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COLLECTOR'S  
EDITION



# ROBIN GRAY

CHARLES GIBSON





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## OPINIONS OF THE PRESS ON “ROBIN GRAY.”

“Pure in sentiment, well written, and cleverly constructed. . . . The characters are well drawn, Jeanie especially is very noble, and so in a less degree are her lover and her husband.”—*British Quarterly Review*.

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"SHE CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF JAMES FALCON COMING ALONG."

(See page 11.

LONDON  
Henry S. King & Co., 65, Chancery Lane  
1873

249. 4 5



# ROBIN GRAY.

*A NOVEL.*

BY

CHARLES GIBBON,

AUTHOR OF "FOR LACK OF GOLD."



"Had we never loved sae kindly,  
Had we never loved sae blindly,  
Never met—or never parted,  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

—Burns.

LONDON:  
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1872.

249. 9. 573.



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# ROBIN GRAY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE LAIRD O' CLASHGIRN.

"The Laird o' Cockpen, he's proud and he's great,  
His mind is ta'en up wi' affairs o' the state."

NICOL MCWHAPPLE, with a startled expression on his sharp, hawkish features, sat in his chair, clutching his silver snuff-box tightly with one hand, whilst the other was arrested midway between the box and his nose with a pinch of the pungent dust.

He stared searchingly at the frank, good-natured face of the young man who was standing on the hearth. Presently the look of alarm faded, and the face assumed its ordinary stolid and expressionless cast, as the hand continued its journey to the nose, and thrust the snuff up the nostrils energetically. Then he closed the box with a vigorous snap.

It was something to have made Nicol McWapple angry, for it was the boast of the Laird of Clashgirn that he never lost command of his temper. It was still more to have brought an expression—and especially an expression of alarm—to his visage; for it was a by-word amongst some of the folk in Portlappoch that "ye could nae mair ken what the Laird was thinking by his face than ye could tell what he was gaun to do by what he said."

It was a keen face running from the high cheek-bones to a sharp point at the clean-shaven chin. The complexion sallow, with a sandyish reflection from the thin, short whiskers, and the thin, yellowish hair. When in conversation, the face had always a quiet pawky smile, suggestive of how much more he knew of the circumstances concerning which one might

be speaking than the speaker did, and what a deal of information he could give if he thought it necessary. At the same time he had a way of drooping the lids over his small, pale, ferrety eyes, and occasionally giving his head a jerk forward like a hawk dabbing at its prey.

Placid, pawky, cunning, with a small shrunken body and a lame leg, he had fought his way to wealth, and such respect as a certain degree of sanctimonious conduct and successful trading always command.

So, it was a feat to have moved such a personage as this, and possibly the consequences to the performer of the feat would be all the more serious on account of the speed with which the apparent effect was dispelled.

"Do ye mean to say, Jeamie, that I would be guilty o' onything dishonourable, or in contravention o' the law of the land," said the Laird, with his pawky smile, and one of his hawkish dabs, whilst he tapped the lid of his snuff-box playfully.

"I'm no to say onything unless you provoke me, Laird, and then it would only be to yoursel'. I'm no a gauger, thank goodness, nor a messenger-at-arms either, and you've been my frien'," was the answer of James Falcon, a stalwart young fellow in loose rough garments, partaking in character as much of the fisherman as the ploughman.

A bright dark-eyed fellow, with crisp black hair, open, honest countenance, and broad chest. Whilst he acted as grieve on Clashgirn, he was frequently out with the herring-fishers, so that he had learned to handle the small craft with as much skill as he guided a plough or a horse, and he knew every sounding from Portlappoch to Islay.

"Aye, jist so," commented the Laird, "only to mysel'. Weel, are you trying to threaten me into submission to your wishes? Is that what you're driving at?"

"Threaten!" and Jeamie laughed loudly; "hoots mon, what's the use o' taking it that way. This is just the long and the short o't. I come to you and tell you I want to get married, and you see no objection to that. Then I mind you

that you promised to let me have the farm o' Askaig some day."

"I'll say that yet" (benignantly), "and I never break my word."

"Well, I tell you I want it now, and you answer me by asking what siller I hae to stock it. But you ken well enough that I hav'nae a penny. You have never given me a wage for my work; you have scarcely given me a shilling to let me ken the road to my pouch; and when I tell you that I have nothing, you haud up your hands, and gie me a sermon about extravagance and riotous living."

"In the which I was but doing my duty as an elder o' the kirk, and as your friend."

Jeamie laughed again, but with a shade of contempt on his honest face this time.

"May be so, Laird, as an elder it might be your duty to preach; but as my friend you ken'd that I never had a chance of being a wastrel. You ken'd that the Laird o' Clashgirn was profiting by my management o' the farm, and has profited for the last five year better than he's ever likely to do again wi' the same place. Weel, in return for the work I have given you without a grumble and without a fee, I ask you noo to let me have the farm, and give me two years' credit for the stock."

"Which is a very modest demand in your estimation, nae doot" (tapping the snuff-box).

"Modest enough, considerin' that I have never had a ploughman's wages for doing the work o' three, and for bringing a guid few hunners into your purse that would never have been there without me. But you ken that I am asking nothing from you that I will not repay with whatever interest you want; only you think that you made more out of me on the old terms. And so you would, if it did not happen that the old terms are at an end. I am going to be married, and I must have the means to keep my wife."

"A very sensible determination, Jeamie; I commend your forethocht in looking out for the meal afore ye bring a

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hungry mou' to the parritch pot. That's an excellent principle to observe."

"Thank you for discovering so much good in me. But when you answered me wi' a screed o' texts about ingratitude and self-seeking, and that while I ken'd that you were calculating how many pounds sterling you would lose by the change, I could not help letting you feel that I ken'd whar a part o' your siller cam frae, and hoo it was gotten."

"Ye mean, of course, your ain suspicion, which is no worth a bodle in a court o' law. If I looked ony way queer when ye mentioned the matter, it was just the natural surprise o' a man in my position and o' my character even being suspecket o' dealing unfairly wi' the fortune o' a friend, and especially an unlucky ane. But we'll set that aside for the present, and if ye please we'll look at your ain particular affairs."

"That's more to my liking."

"Very weel: ye hae stated your case, and I'm no saying but that ye hae put it wi' as muckle ability as lawyer Carnegie could hae done himsel'. Now let me state mine."

"Out wi't."

"Very weel: just look round ye. This is a cosy bit parlour, an' there's no muckle wrong wi' the house. Ony-way there's aye plenty meat and drink in it, and that's a blessing everybody has nae got. Everything has been at your command; ye hae never wanted bite nor sup for fifteen year. Ye hae been treated just as though ye had been a bairn o' my ain, and I'm no saying but I may hae had thoughts o' leaving ye a bit siller when the time cam' for my savings to be distributed. But a while before that time, ye come and make a demand upon me, just as though ye had the richt to demand, and that gars me think ye hae forgotten that ye are neither kith nor kin to me."

There was a shadow deepening on Jemie's face.

"No, Laird," he said in a low voice, and giving his shoulders a rough twist, "I hae forgotten naething."

"Aye, weel, it does nae harm to mind ye that fifteen year syne, a woman wi' a laddie about six year auld cam' to this



house. She was footsore and hungry, puir body, and I took pity on her. I gied her meat and drink and a bed to lie on. Folk said I ought to hae sent her to the poorhouse ; but she was nae weel, and I let her bide here twa or three days——”

“Aye, but folk said and say you had other reasons than charity for keeping her here, where naebody could learn what she might hae had to say about hersel’ or her bairn,” interrupted Falcon, with an angry flush.

The Laird’s eyelids drooped ; he smiled as if pitying the young man’s ignorance and passion. Then he took another pinch of snuff, made another hawkish dab, and proceeded :

“She died here, and I buried her at my ain cost in the auld kirkyard. Ye ken the place.”

The rough sleeve of Jeanie’s coat was shading his eyes at that moment. He was choking, and made no answer, for he was thinking how often he had stood staring at the slab of stone which covered the grave, and how cold and silent it had always been to his eager questioning about the unhappy mother whose image was only a shadowy memory to him, but whose love was always with him.

“Mair than that,” the Laird continued, “her laddie, wha had nae frien’s that onybody hereabout ken’d o’, would hae had to gang to the poorhouse ; but instead o’ that I kept him here, gied him a decent education, and brought him up in a Christian way. If he worked for me, and if he was obedient to me, it was nae mair than I had a richt to expeck after a’ I had done for him. Lastly, I think that before he speaks o’ settin’ up for himself, and asking me for the loan o’ the necessary capital, he ought to think o’ repaying me the outlay I hae been at on his account.”

“So be it, then,” said Falcon impetuously, “I’ll pay you every farthing of it if I live, but I’ll work no more for you. What is the sum you demand, in addition to the work you have already had ?”

“I couldna just exactly tell ye at a minute’s notice, but I’ll mak up the account.”

“And I’ll pay it, if I live. But let there be no more talk o’

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gratitude between us, seeing that I know enough to hang you if I cared to follow up the clue."

A second time the expression of alarm flitted across Nicol McWhapple's visage, and again it disappeared under the influence of a vigorous pinch of snuff. As James Falcon was striding to the door, he called to him in his pawky tone,—

"Bide a wee, Jeanie, lad, bide a wee. Although ye hae lost your temper, and consequently your common sense, I hae nae. Ye hae scarcely a bawbee in your pouch, and yet ye're talking o' repaying me maybe a hunner pounds, just as though ye had a bag o' gowd. I'll no press ye for my account, ye ken, but what are ye to do for a living? Fee yoursel'?—I'll gie ye a recommendation."

"No, I'll not fee."

"Maybe ye would like to turn sailor?"

"That is what I mean to do. A sailor has better wages than a ploughman, and mair chance of making money, and I must get money."

"Just so. Then if ye like I'll speak to Ivan Carrach. His brig is to sail the morn, and maybe he'll gie ye a berth if I ask him."

Falcon hesitated, then with sudden resolution :

"I'll accept this service from you, because it'll help me to pay your debt the sooner."

And without a word of thanks he went out.

The Laird sat with his chin sunk on his breast, and his ferretty eyes twinkling at the fire. He was thinking of the ingratitude of his species, no doubt, and especially of this youth, whom he had fed and clothed, and who had now, like the serpent, stung the bosom to which he had been metaphorically pressed. He was thinking of the fellow's boldness and heartlessness, which had dared to impugn his respectability. What would the members of the kirk say, what would the minister say, if that story at which Falcon had hinted were revived amongst them?

It had given him trouble enough years ago; it had cost him more than twenty years of sanctimonious hypocrisy to over-

come the doubts of his honesty which were abroad. He had succeeded at last; as witness the fact that he had been elected elder of the kirk and a magistrate of the burgh. He had as great a craving for respectability as a pretty woman has for flattery. And he had obtained it. He had made "siller," and he had become known to the great families of the county; he had even been privileged to obtain an audience with the Duke of Argyle on one occasion.

All that he had craved he had won; and now—the breath of one man threatened to blow down the house of cards he had been at so much pains to build. That man, too, was the one who had helped to build the house; for Nicol McWhapple's charity in first succouring the strange woman from the storm and starvation, and then adopting her child into his house, had been the prime cause of his elevation to favour in the eyes of the folk of Portlappoch.

The story which placed him in this predicament was a simple one, so far as it was known. Hugh Sutherland, the former proprietor of the lands whereof McWhapple was the present laird, had been known to his friends and neighbours as a timid man—one more likely to tremble at the suggestion of a conspiracy than to join it. Yet suddenly it was made known that he had become involved in one of those wretched conspiracies for the overthrow of the Government which the French Revolution engendered in Britain.

Everybody who had any acquaintance with the man was astounded; more at the idea of such a man falling into such an error than at the error itself. The rumour, however, was confirmed, for before any open proceedings could be taken against him, Mr. Sutherland, to save his estate from confiscation, made it over to Nicol McWhapple, his friend and factor; and to save his head from the penalty of his sin, he escaped to France.

The last positive news that was heard of him was to the effect that he had married. Afterwards came rumours that he had died in poverty, and had left his wife and a child to the charity of strangers, for she had no relations to assist her.

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The sorrowful picture which this rumour presented roused the ire of the folk against Nicol, who was reported to have taken advantage of the circumstances under which Sutherland had fled, and to have denied the unfortunate exile and his family the bare means of subsistence out of his own property.

The statement of McWhapple, however, was simple, and he produced letters and other documents to verify it. Sutherland had gambled largely at the German Spas: McWhapple as his agent had raised money by mortgage to supply his employer. The latter died in a drunken brawl; and his wife was carried to the same grave six weeks after her husband. They had no children; and according to the will of Sutherland the property was left—so far as he had power to leave it, and so far as there was anything to leave after the mortgages had been redeemed—to Nicol McWhapple, his faithful friend and factor.

By dint of saving and successful trading McWhapple was enabled to pay off the mortgages gradually, and at last to enter into full possession as the Laird of Clashgirn.

For some reason known to himself he was troubled in spirit as he ruminated on these matters, and he dipped frequently into his snuff-box, which was always an indication that he was perturbed.

At last he seized his staff, which was almost as stout and big as a crutch, and raised himself to his feet.

"Aye, I'll see Ivan Carrach and I'll double the insurance," he muttered, "syne if onything should happen it's a' through his ain thrawnness, and the Lord's will be done."

Mr. McWhapple limped out to the stable and caused the cattleman to saddle his pony.

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## CHAPTER II.

## A PARTING.

"The nicht is mirk an' the wind blaws schill,  
An' the white faem weets my bree,  
An' my mind misgies me, gay maiden,  
That the land we shall never see."—*Wm. Motherwell:*

THE Laird had seen James Falcon laughing good-naturedly at the terror his revival of that old story about the Sutherlands, and certain hints anent the character of the Laird's trading had caused; and he had seen him downcast enough when he found that his proposal for the farm was rejected. But he could no more understand the real extent of Falcon's suffering than he could appreciate its source.

Falcon had been obliged to work hard for the charity Dives had extended to him, and out of which so much capital had been made. He had, however, found a friend in the minister, Mr. Monduff, and with his assistance he had managed to educate himself to a degree much beyond that usually attained by lads of a much higher position. Rough work, rough usage, and rough companions had not extinguished a certain natural refinement in the lad, for happily his reading and honest heart had counteracted the influences which his position brought to bear upon him.

He had quitted Clashgirn in a sad humour; but he had little shown the bitter feelings he endured; he said little of the dream he had been nursing for two years, and which had grown to be the leading influence of his life.

He felt that he had repaid the Laird trebly for all that he had done for him, and he had expected him to observe the promise he had given him more than once.

He had a kindly feeling toward the man who had been his benefactor, although he had long ceased to respect him.

He could not shut his eyes to the thousand petty hypocrisies of the Laird's character, and the perception of them was fatal to respect.

But at the present moment he felt as if even what liking he

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had for him had been extinguished by this last stroke of utter selfishness, as he regarded it. There would have been much bitterness in his heart had not its sense of loss been too great for minor feelings to obtain much sway. Contempt does not spring up in a day in a generous nature. He was disposed rather to make the best of matters as they stood, and to seek courage in hope than to waste time in useless revilings.

"For after all," he thought, "I have no right to expect him to make any sacrifice on my account. I can work, and Jeanie will wait."

He had come to that healthy conclusion by the time he reached Portlappoch, which was distant about two miles from Clashgirn.

The village, or town as the inhabitants invariably called it, consisted of about a dozen rows of houses running in irregular lines from the shore, half way up a broad hill, which was one of a range stretching east and west. The houses were of all sizes and shapes, from the low-built brown thatched cot of the fisher to the two-story sandstone mansion which had been erected for the bank. They were with few exceptions white-washed, and covered for the most part with red tiles or thatch. They were huddled closely together as if for protection and warmth, consequently the streets or lanes were narrow, and pervaded with the smell and signs of the chief article of trade in the place—fish. Heads, tails, and sometimes whole skeletons of fish of every kind were plentifully strewn about, until a shower of rain fell and swept the streets clean down to the shore, where the sea lapping the shingly beach murmured its plaintive song of hope and warning to the wives and bairns of those who were out upon its broad bosom. Boat-building was the next important business of the little place, but that was confined chiefly to the making and repair of the fishermen's smacks, or an occasional job with some of the craft which put in at the port. The coopers did a thriving business; and on market-days the two inns barely afforded accommodation for the custom of the farmers and cattle-dealers who gathered on those occasions.

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Just outside the village, and overlooking the beach, stood a square whitewashed cottage, with blackened thatch, square windows with small diamond-shaped panes, two rough-cut fir poles standing as a sort of porch in front of the squat-looking door which opened in halves, and admitted one straight to the kitchen. Half a dozen oars of various lengths leaning against the porch, the walls hung with nets, an old boat lying bottom upwards, cocks and hens pecking about, a cow grazing on the bit of grass by the roadside, and a general air of cleanliness about everything—such were the chief characteristics of Adam Lindsay's home. Adam himself was seated on the old boat mending a net, and a girl was standing in the doorway shading the light of the setting sun from her eyes with her hand, and peering down the road. Through the trees, which were just beginning to bud and put on their gay spring dress, she caught a glimpse of James Falcon coming along at his swinging pace.

The hand dropped to her side, and she smiled happily as she retreated into the house and resumed the task she had left for a moment to look for his coming.

She was a bonnie lass, with fair hair, brown eyes, and brown cheeks. There was a bright healthy look on the face always, with its soft impulsive features. She was about twenty years of age, and in her neat short-gown, blue-striped petticoat, and tidy apron, made a prettier picture than if she had been arrayed in all the finery of the city madam. There was nothing sentimental about her manner or bearing, although she had from childhood known the difficulties of making both ends meet. She had stout arms and hands, which showed that she was accustomed to use them in earnest work.

She could read the Bible, and she could write a letter with some care; but that was about the limit of her educational acquirements; for she had been permitted few opportunities, even if she had the desire to learn more.

For eight years she had been the housekeeper. She had been compelled to look after the cooking, the cleaning, the hens, and the cow; and she had had to nurse her mother, who

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had been stricken with paralysis, and for eight years had scarcely been able to move farther than from the bed to the arm-chair.

This was more than a young girl's share of responsibilities; but Jeanie submitted to them with a good cheer that made the work seem light and the duty easy to perform.

Adam was proud of his daughter, and loved her in his way. He would have risked his life under any circumstances to have saved hers, as indeed he would have risked it to save that of anybody else whom he might have seen in danger. But his was a dry sort of nature, and although in his pride of Jeanie he might boast of her thrift and industry, he did not seem to realize the idea that she was doing any more than she ought to do, or than any other girl would do under similar conditions.

He was disposed to rule his house with a rod of iron, and exacted strict obedience to his slightest command. He had no idea of sympathizing with his daughter, and yet he was not intentionally a hard man either to wife or daughter. He was disposed to be out of humour and sterner than usual whenever he had had a bad "take;" but otherwise he was good-tempered enough.

He was industrious, and although fond of a dram, he did not often get fou'. He went to kirk regularly twice every Sabbath—making a slight stir perhaps, in starting, about the dressing of his shirt front and the arrangement of his stock; and he spent the afternoon, with brief intervals, during which he went out to look at the weather, in reading the Bible to his daughter and bed-stricken wife, his favourite chapter being the fifth of Luke, where Simon obtains the miraculous draught of fishes.

"Weel, Jeames, how's a' wi' ye?" he said, drawing the net across his knees, and without looking up, as Falcon advanced.

"Is Jeanie in?" was the abrupt response.

"Aye, she's ben the house" (looking up); "but what's wrang wi' ye that ye're scoolin' like a fishwife at a bad bawbee?"

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"Everything's wrang, Adam; but ye'll ken about it soon enough. I want to see Jeanie first."

And he went into the house.

As he entered, Jeanie was baking bannocks, with the sleeves of her short-gown rolled up, displaying the plump rounded arms; and she turned with one of the cakes on her hands to place it on the girdle, giving him a quick bright glance and a smile at the same time. But the smile fled at sight of the trouble on his face.

All that he had come to tell was soon told. Their marriage must be postponed for a year, may be two years; for the Laird had broken his promise, and he must go work for money to make a house for her.

He was a little chagrined that she did not take the news more to heart. But she only looked serious for a moment, and then, wiping her hands, she said quietly:

"We're no that auld but we can wait a year or twa, Jeanie; and maybe it's better sae, for I dinna ken what mither would do if I was eot o' the house."

"Aye," he said bitterly, "but I had hoped to offer your mother a home with us, and now there's no chance of that for a long while, and Lord kens what may happen before then. The outlook is a driech ane for you an' me baith."

"But we needna mak' it waur nor it is, Jeanie, by fricht-enin' oursel's wi' thochts o' brownies and kelpies that may never come near us. The best way is to tak' a stout heart to a stey brae, and, as the minister says, wha kens what fortune we'll find when we win to the tap?"

He took her hands—the meal had been rubbed off them now—and he looked in her bonnie bright face, feeling much the same as a man might who is suddenly brought out of darkness into the sunshine.

"Ye're a sensible lass," he said, smiling hopefully; "and you mind me that I dinna come here to draw a long face, and bewail my lot, but to tell you that the thocht o' you will put pith into my heart and arms, that for your sake I'll work—aye, and win too."

"That's mair like yoursel', Jeamie," and there were tears in her eyes as she spoke; for with all the perversity of a woman's nature, as soon as he began to think cheerfully of the parting, she began to realize its pain. But they spoke bravely of the future for all that, and with the trust of youth planned what was to be done a year or two years hence with as much confidence as if the period to elapse were only a day.

Then Adam came in, and the state of affairs was explained to him. He did not see anything to be troubled about, and he wished Jeames a guid voyage in just the same tone as he was accustomed at nights to wish him a safe road home.

The three went "butt the house," to the auld wife, a patient meek-eyed woman, who endured her affliction with the calmness of one whose faith is perfect.

"The Lord prosper ye in the strange paths that lie afore ye Jeamie," she said kindly; "and dinna forget to read your Bible constantly. In the wildest storm ye're as safe on sea as land when ye're in God's care. That thocht has comforted me mony a time when Adam was in danger."

Jeanie went to the door with him. They lingered there listening to that strange song of the sea, which was louder than evet it had been before now, and bore a new meaning.

"When I hear it, I'll be thinking o' ye, an praying for ye," she said, with a subdued sob.

He hugged her in his arms as if he never could part with her. Then with an effort, and a stifled husky "Heaven keep ye, my lass," he broke away from her, running down the road toward the town as if afraid to look back. But when he reached the end of the old dyke where he would disappear from her, he turned.

She was still there. She waved her hand; and he felt that she was trying to give him a last smile of comfort through her tears.

She was standing there long after she had lost sight of him, standing there watching the road he had gone by, while the sun was sinking rapidly and the clouds were darkening overhead. Her heart was sinking too, for it seemed as if the sun

were setting upon her happiness, and those murky clouds up yonder betokened the coming storm.

She was roused at last by her father's voice bidding her come into the house. She turned to her work with some notion that busy hands soften grief. And she had need to be busy at present, for her mother was worse than usual, and the last had been the worst fishing season her father had ever known. So that he who had prided himself upon owing no man a farthing, was at this time owing several pounds, and that was an enormous sum to Adam Lindsay and his daughter.

She had not mentioned this to James Falcon, but she had been thinking of it when she had said that perhaps it was better their marriage should be delayed a little while yet.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### AT THE PORT.

'To mak' the crown a pound, my Jeannie gaed to sea;  
An' the crown an' the pound, they were baith for me.'

—*The Ballad.*

DOWN at the Port, amidst barrels and ropes and boat-tackle of all descriptions, a group of men—sailors, fishermen, and ragged hangers-on who eke out a living at all such places by doing odd jobs for anybody who will give them a few pence—were discussing some important topic in which the brig *Colin*, lying in the port, was interested, as was apparent from the frequent curious glances which were cast toward her.

At the water edge was another group; but this one consisted of men and women, and chiefly townsfolk, who were gathered around the owner of a fishing-smack which had just come in. They were haggling about the price of fish, every one keenly alive as to the value of a penny, amidst much jesting and laughing.

Loudest amongst the higglers was a woman, who was raised above the others by standing up in her cart, to which a shaggy patient-looking donkey was harnessed. The cart was not

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much bigger than a large sized barrow, and was a rough-looking affair glistening all over with fish-scales. The body was constructed of unplaned boards rudely nailed together, and seemed shaky enough.

Girzie Todd and her cuddy-cart were known all over the country. She bought fish at the Port and with her cart conveyed it from house to house and from farm to farm, earning a decent livelihood for herself and her son—"a puir demintit creatur', wha had na half the gumption o' his mither's cuddy," as the folk said, pitying the mother and admiring her brisk industrious ways, wondering often what was to become of the poor natural when her time came.

She was a woman of about fifty years, but as lithe as a girl of twenty. She was about the average height of women, but with the firm muscles of a man, although there was nothing either coarse or masculine in her figure. She was simply firmly knit, as one might say; and her face, brown as an autumn leaf, was lit by two sparkling grey eyes and showed regular features, which indicated that once on a time she had been a braw lass with wooers in plenty.

She was a sharp, busy woman, with ready hands, quick wit, and quick ears.

Of the latter faculty she gave an evidence now; for whilst she was bargaining for the fish, one of the men of the first group said excitedly and speaking louder than the others—

"He swore, pe-tam, she would sail wi' the morn's tide whether it was Friday or Saturday. I'se no gae wi' him ony way, for its just fleeing in the face o' Providence."

"Aye, man," cried Girzie turning round, "Ivan Carrach was ay kenned to be ready tae flee in the face o' Providence or ony ither body that was in his gate. But there's a storm brewing yonder in the lift that'll maybe gar him be sorry for't this time."

Whether she spoke figuratively or not nobody seemed to guess, but all glanced upwards and shook their heads forebodingly. The bold Highland skipper, who was disposed to sail when he was ready, in spite of all the superstition of the

seamen against beginning a voyage on a Friday, had no friends there. Two of his hands had openly refused to join him as soon as his intention to sail next day had been made known.

Girzie was back to her bargaining again in a minute, and so she did not seem to observe James Falcon, who came up to the seaman who had declared his resolve not to sail in the *Colin*, and asked if he knew where Carrach might be found.

"I saw him up at the Port Inn wi' Clashgirn," answered another of the men, and Falcon immediately wheeled about.

The Port Inn was the larger of the two hostelries in the village, and was situated about half-way up the main street. It was squat, old-fashioned, whitewashed, and red-tiled; surrounded by stables and sheds, and having a large open space in front, which, on market-days, was crowded with carts and gigs.

The Laird was mounting his Shetland pony, and Carrach was assisting him, as Falcon approached.

"Ye understand, then, Carrack," McWhapple was saying in an undertone, whilst his eyes twinkled on the skipper, "it would be nae great loss to you or me if onything happened the brig; and the lad's meddlesome and micht do you harm."

"I'll know all about it," answered Carrach, slowly, and with a strong Highland twang.

"Od, it's extaordinar', here's the lad himsel'," said the Laird, observing Falcon. "I have spoken to Carrach, Jeanie, and arranged everything for you wi' him. But you can speak to him yoursel' now, and I'll see you when you come hame for your claes. Guid day to you, Carrach, and a safe voyage."

McWhapple's pony moved away with its master at a douce jog-trot pace.

"So, you are the lad," said Carrach, giving his shaggy red head a jerk, which was intended for a nod of recognition.

He was a broad-built fellow, with fiery red hair, whiskers, and beard, which gave his bovine-like eyes and pug nose the appearance of features planted in the midst of a huge sun-flower.

"I suppose so," answered Falcon, "will I do?"

The calf's eyes of the man rolled over him as if measuring his height, weight, and strength.

" You'll no be feart to sail on a Friday ? "

" No."

" Then you'll to; and as I want to clear the port afore twelve if it's possible, shust to quiet thae gomerils wha are feart of the Friday, the sooner you are on poard the better,—pe-tam."

The latter words were the usual termination of any observation the skipper desired to render emphatic.

The Laird, in his character of generous patron, had evidently arranged matters so completely with Carrach that there remained nothing for the young man himself to do but to get on board.

It puzzled him for a moment to comprehend why McWhapple should take so much interest in his affairs after what had passed between them, and the unpleasant manner in which they had parted. But the riddle was solved as soon as he remembered that it was the Laird's policy in every unpleasant transaction to do his utmost to bring matters into such a focus as to enable him to play the martyr. Thereby he obtained new credit for his meek, suffering, injured innocence. The whole conduct of the man was plain to Falcon when he recollect ed that. So he laughed and hurried back to Clashgirn. He made up his clothes in a bundle—he had not many, and he did not take more than he thought he would positively need—and then he proceeded to take his leave of the folk about the place.

First, there was Mrs. Begg the housekeeper—a buxom widow, who had long lived in the hope of one day becoming Mrs. McWhapple. The dame's breath was taken away by Jeamie's announcement of his departure; and the next minute she was filling his pockets with whangs of cheese and farls of oatcake, so that he should not starve on the first stage of his journey at any rate.

Next, there was the Laird, who played the martyr as Falcon had expected, and even pretended to be deeply affected at the

sudden separation, assuring him again and again that it was no desire of his that he should leave the comfortable house in which he had been brought up and tenderly cared for. He was beginning what threatened to be a long lecture of paternal counsel, well larded with text, when Jeanie stopped him with an abrupt reminder of their recent conversation.

"Od, it's extro'rdinar!" exclaimed the Laird, with a sigh of resignation, and taking a pinch of snuff, but not in the least abashed; "aweel, aweel, gang your ain gate, Jeanie lad; but ye'll travel a day and a nicht afore ye find a hame like the ane you're flinging frae ye."

"For what you have done, Laird, you have my thanks," answered Jeanie frankly; "for what you might have done—well, I had no right to expect it."

And he broke away, the exclamation, "Od, it's extro'rdinar," reaching his ears as he closed the door.

Next to the byre where the lasses were milking, and then to the stable where the lads had just come from the fields and were "sorting" their horses for the night. Lasses and lads were astounded and grieved too; for he had been a kindly taskmaster and a true friend to them all. They gave him a hearty good speed when, after shaking hands with the men and—yes, though his heart was full of Jeanie—kissing the lasses, he hurried down the road. All the good qualities he had possessed, and a few he had not possessed, were canvassed regretfully that night in the bothy and the cots.

By ten o'clock he was at the Port again, and as he was making his way to the brig, guided by her lights, his arm was suddenly grasped by somebody who darted upon him from the darkness.

"Holloa, who's that?"

"Deed an' it's just me, Girzie Todd," was the answer, in the brisk tones of the fishwife; "an' here hae I been waiting a whale hour this mirk nicht expeckin' ye."

"Waiting for me!—Why, Girzie?"

Her hand tightened upon his arm as if she were labouring with some strong emotion.

"Adam Lindsay tauld me ye were to sail in the *Colin*."

"And so I am. I'm going on board now, as she sails tonight. What then?"

"I wanted to warn ye no to gang with Ivan Carrach," she said, drawing him close to her, and speaking in his ear with a strange earnestness.

"And why not, for Guid's sake?"

He was almost inclined to laugh at her singular conduct.

"Ye'll maybe think it's just an auld wife's clavers," she answered in the same serious tone, "but tak' tent; ye want to come back an' marry Jeanie, an' ye'll never come back if ye gang in that boat."

"Toots, Girzie, why should I not go in the *Colin* as well as any other?"

"Because the *Colin's* doomed!"

Falcon was not sure whether to laugh outright or take alarm. Her words were serious, her manner impressive, but he could not throw up his duty for mere words, which might or might not be spoken in jest.

"How do you happen to ken a' this?" he asked.

She seemed to divine the incredulity with which her warning had been received, and she flung his arm from her.

"I canna tell ye ony mair, an' I winna," she answered sharply, drawing her short cloak around her; if it hadna been for Jeanie's sake, I wouldna hae said as muckle. But gang ye i' the *Colin*, an' ye'll never be guidman tae Jeanie Lindsay."

"If any danger threatens the brig, that's all the more reason why I should be aboard, for if I can save her it'll maybe repay some of the debt I owe Clashgirn."

Girzie uttered a low contemptuous laugh.

"Hae your way; I hae dune a' I can to save ye."

"Good-bye, Girzie; I'll come back to Jeanie, tell her, whatever befa' the *Colin*."

There was no answer. Girzie had moved away before he had finished speaking, and in the darkness had disappeared immediately.

There was a general bustle and flitting of lights on board

when Falcon stepped on the deck. He was set to work at once, and the excitement soon drove Girzie's words out of his mind.

There was a stiff breeze in their favour, and the brig was soon out of port.

"Heave ahead," shouted Carrach hoarsely, "and tam ta Friday—we've cheated her this time."

So they had, for as the sails were filling to the breeze they heard faintly on the waters the bell of the Portlappoch steeple tolling midnight.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### FOREBODINGS.

"The gloomy night is gathering fast,  
Loud roars the wild inconstant blast.  
Yon murky cloud is foul with rain,  
I see it driving o'er the plain."—*Burns.*

SINCE early morning the clouds in dense grey masses had been shifting restlessly. Heavy showers had descended at intervals, sweeping the streets of the town, and drenching the crowds of farmers and their wives—the latter having skirts carefully tucked up—soaking the groups of grain merchants, farm servants, cattle-dealers, drovers, and the miscellaneous characters with barrowfuls of "sweeties" who usually assembled on the market day.

Business was dull as the day except at the inns, which were reeking with the fumes of toddy and the steam off the wet garments of the customers. Knots of men stood under the shelter of sheds and doorways chaffering, and the cattle stood dripping in the market-place. Men and cattle were "drookit" and uncomfortable. So the necessary business of the day was hurried over, and all who could manage it started early for home.

Fishermen's wives cast anxious glances toward the glistening sea, which, as if in sympathy with the clouds, rolled and

waves, impetuously bearing up white spume foam on the beach and against the stone walls of the quay.

Jeanie was one of those who looked often and troublosly towards the sea, for Adam had gone out before daybreak in spite of the increasing storm. Her mother too seemed to be unusually afflignet by the weather, for she had one of her "bad twaits" in the morning, and she was very weak.

Frequently she had asked Jeanie if there were any signs of her father returning, and Jeanie had run round to the end of the quay to peer across the broad turbulent water. But it was only to go back to her mother with the unsatisfactory tidings that although she saw several boats putting in for the shore, she could not distinguish her father's amongst them.

As the afternoon advanced, the clouds darkened, and a thick rainy mist lowered upon the water, so that she could see nothing beyond the beach. Her mother's uneasiness disturbed her filled her with strange fears. Her father had been out in many a storm, but she had never experienced such anxiety as on this day.

Somehow she seemed to have lost courage during the few weeks which had elapsed since James Falcon's departure. At any rate, she was more easily alarmed than formerly at the thought of storms and wrecks. The great rolling ocean seemed to her more callous, more resistless, and bigger than it had ever seemed previously. That new meaning which she had obtained from the ceaseless murmur of the waters while standing at the door with Falcon on the evening of his departure was broadening out into new thoughts, new hopes and fears.

"Noo sight o' him yet, Jeanie?" queried her mother again, when she saw her lighting the candle and placing it in the window to serve as a feeble beacon to the absent one.

"He'll be hame the noo, mither," was Jeanie's answer, in a tone that she tried to render cheerful; "that is, if he be na to bide ower at the Mull a' nicht."

"Aye, he used to dae that whiles langsyne when it was ower rough to cross," muttered Mrs. Lindsay in the tone of

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one who tries feebly to unseat a conviction which is obtaining a firm place in her mind.

The thunder of wind and waves rendered the voices of the women scarcely audible to each other, and a knock at the door had to be repeated two or three times before Jeanie observed it. Then her eyes opened wide, and she glanced nervously toward her mother to see if she had heard the summons.

She had heard it, and her sad shrunken face wore the expression of one who listens intently for the confirmation of some terror.

"There's somebody chappin'," Jeanie said, with assumed indifference, as she proceeded to answer the knock.

A fierce gust of wind blew out the candle the moment she opened the door, so that she could not see who was standing without.

"Wha's that?" she asked; and her voice trembled with vague fears in spite of the assurance she had tried to force upon herself that this was some one who had missed the road in the darkness, and, seeing the light in the cottage, had stopped to inquire the way.

"It's me, Jeanie," was the response in a kindly tone. "I want to come ben, an' I'm trying to fasten the bridle o' the pony to the bush here."

She knew the voice, although there was a strange tone in it to-night—a tone which suddenly gave shape to all those vague fears she had been haunted by. She hastily closed the door of her mother's room, retreated to the kitchen, and lit the candle at the fire. When she turned round, the man was standing beside her.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered, muscular man, dressed in garments of rough home-spun tweed, and with an enormous grey plaid drawn tightly across his breast and shoulders. His clothes were soaked with the rain, and as he removed his broad-brimmed bonnet to shake the water from it, a massive head, with thick iron-grey hair and clear high brow, were revealed. His features were plain, but the light of his deep-

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set blue eyes was indicative, on close observation, of a strong will underlying a warm genial nature.

He was, in brief, one of those honest common-place farmer-like bodies whom you would meet a dozen times before you became conscious of anything more than that he possessed a loud friendly voice, a hearty smile, and considerable muscular development. He was in age over fifty years, but his hale healthy appearance would have suggested that he was scarcely more than forty.

The moment Jeanie saw his face she knew that there was something wrong, and her own became white, for the wind was soighing wildly round the house.

Usually his greeting was loud and hearty and his eyes sparkled with good humour. But now he wore a wistful doubting expression in which pity and respect were mingled. Besides, he occupied an unnecessary length of time in shaking his bonnet and uttering fitful ejaculations about the storm and the darkness.

She noted these things and waited for him to speak ; but when she saw that his eyes could not meet hers steadily, she passed quickly to the door without a word.

She peered down the road and distinguished two lights flickering feebly through the mist and moving toward her ; and she experienced a sickening sensation, while the pale lights suddenly began to dance before her fantastically.

The man had followed her, and his hand was now laid quietly on her arm, drawing her from the door. She looked up at him with a white still face, and she was shivering as with intense cold.

" Ye needna speak, Mister Gray," she whispered, glancing affrightedly toward the room in which her mother lay listening. " I ken a'. My faither's drooned."

" No, no, Jeanie," he interrupted huskily, " it's no sae bad as a' that."

She gripped his arm quickly, gazing at him beseechingly, as if she thought that with kindly intent he might be trying to hide the truth.



"What are the folk bringing here, then?"

"Your faither; but there's no muckle wrang wi' him. He was landin' safe an' sound frae his boat when a muckle wave gied her a wallop in the stern, and wi' the lurch she gied your faither tumbled down and hurt himsel' a wee. But it's naething particular, the doctor says—a broken arm at the warst."

"Are ye—are ye sure it's nae waur?"

"Sure as that I'm here telling o't. I was about taking my way hame frae market when I heard that Adam had got himsel' hurt, and I gaed doon to see what was wrang. Syne, after the doctor had sorted him up a wee, we got Girzie Todd's cuddy-cart to bring him hame, and I thocht I would ride on afore the lave, sae that ye might be kind o' prepared to see him carried in. He's weakly wi' the sair faucht he had to cross frae the Mull, and nae wonder, sae that he looks waur nor he is, and is a wee thing insensible. But that's a', ye may be sure."

"Thank ye, Mr. Gray," she said, with a big sob of relief, while the tears sprung to her eyes. "I'll gang but and tell mither afore the folk come up."

Mrs. Lindsay, with a strength that seemed unnatural in one stricken as she was, had raised herself on her elbow and was staring fixedly at the door.

"What's wrang wi' your faither?" she asked feebly as her daughter appeared.

"Ye needna be frichted, mither, he's just got himsel' hurt; but Mr. Gray, wha's ben the house, says it's naething particular."

And she briefly repeated his explanation of the event.

"The Lord's will be dune," exclaimed the mother meekly, and sinking back on her pillows.

If Jeanie had told her that he was dead she would probably have subsided in the same placid manner with the same ejaculation. Not that she was in any way indifferent to him; but simply because her existence for years past had been one of submission to a severe dispensation, and she had learned to

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accept all the good and ill of the life in which she could take no active part with the one salutation, "His will be done."

Girzie Todd made her appearance with a lantern in one hand, and in the other Adam's jacket, which had been taken off at the doctor's, and which Girzie had carefully brought home.

"Guid e'en to ye, Meg Lindsay," she said in her abrupt way, and throwing the jacket on a chair. "Here's your man brak his arm; but dinna ye fash about it, for that wiuna mend it."

"It's the Lord's will, an' I bow my head."

"Ay, weel, that's a' that can be expeckit frae ye. But ye can do something mair, Jeanie, sae come awa an' let's see whar to put him."

She spoke in the same quick business-like manner in which she would have done if she had been delivering a load of fish. Mrs. Lindsay shuddered slightly, not at the dry tone, but at the, to her, implied profanity of Girzie's remark to Jeanie. She had her doubts about Girzie's spiritual welfare; and indeed the woman was not altogether so regular in her attendance at the kirk as she ought to have been. Many a reprimand she had received from the minister in consequence, but it seemed to have little or no effect upon her.

She hustled out now with Jeanie, and they found the cart drawn close up to the door. One man was holding up a lantern, whilst Gray and another were gently lifting Adam from the bundles of straw on which he had been laid. They carried him into the kitchen and placed him on his daughter's bed. He had recovered consciousness, and was groaning with pain.

Girzie, in her sharp energetic way, turned the men out of the house, and then, with Jeanie's help, she made the injured man as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. When she had given him a dose of the mixture the doctor had sent, and given Jeanie all the doctor's instructions as to what she was to do for the patient, with a few of her own directions, she prepared to leave.

"That's a' we can dae for him enoo, and ye maun just bear up. I'll see how ye're getting on the morn or neist day."

She was moving to the door, and Jeanie was tearfully trying to thank her.

But Girzie did not seem to care about thanks, for in response she only muttered a dry, "Oo aye, that's a richt," and proceeded to turn her patient cuddy's head to the road. When she had done that, she came suddenly back to Jeanie and held up the lantern so that the light shone full upon the girl's face.

"Ye hae na heard aucht o' Jeames Falcon yet?" she asked.

Falcon had never been so far from Jeanie's thoughts as in that moment of her distress about her father; and the abruptness with which she was brought back to that all-important subject, whilst the high wind was fluttering her garments about her, and the loud waves were booming in her ears their dark warnings from the sea, gave her something like a shock, and her countenance changed from the expression of subdued sorrow to one of quick alarm.

"No yet—hae ye?"

Girzie's features gave a queer twist, as if moved by some feeling of which pity and rage formed equal parts, the one preventing the other from predominating, and so presenting an anomalous expression.

"Na; I ken nae mair than that the *Colin* hasna been heard o' since she sailed. But ye'll hae news sune enough, I doubtna. Guid nicht. Ye'd as weel send Robin Gray hame to Cairnieford noo, for it's gey an' late for a bachelor chiel' to be wi' ye, though he be an auld ane."

"Cairnieford!—he gaed awa awhile syne."

"Na; for there's his powny tied to the buss at the end o' the house, though its ower dark for ye to see. Guid nicht. Come awa, Dawnie, and mind your futting."

Dawnie was the cuddy's name, and Girzie led him away, walking at his head holding the lantern toward the earth for him to see, and talking to him as if he had been a human friend.

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Girzie's light soon disappeared in the darkness, and Jeanie, who had been standing in a sort of dull reverie watching it, started, drawing her hand across her eyes in the manner of one awakening from a doze.

"I dinna ken what's come ower me the nicht," she said, staring blankly at the darkness, "but I just feel as I used to do when I was a wee wean and was frichted to gang to the byre after dark for fear o' ghaists. Girzie's a queer creatur', but she couldna mean onything by what she said."

As if to conquer her childish fear, she weat to the end of the house, and found Robin Gray's pony there, as Girzie had told her. She suspected at once where the owner might be found; and her suspicion was confirmed on entering the house, for she heard the farmer of Cairnieford's genial voice speaking to her mother.

He did not stay long after he learned that Adam had fallen asleep. He spoke a few cheery words to the meek mother, and in the narrow little passage at the door he pressed Jeanie's arm warmly—shaking hands was not a general custom amongst these folks. But Robin just took her arm as he was about to pass out, and with an awkwardness that was very unusual for him, said—

"Jeanie, lass, I want ye to promise me ae thing."

"What is it, Mister Gray?"

"That if ye should want for onything, and it's mair nor likely you will, seeing how your faither's laid up, and your mither's hardly able to spin a wee at orra times, that ye'll send for't to Cairnieford, or at ony rate let me ken."

She did not know why; but somehow she hesitated to give the promise his kindness solicited; and although they did not seem to have the slightest association with the matter, Girzie Todd's words recurred to her, and with them came thoughts of Jeamie and the *Colin*.

"I dinna like to be fashin' ye, Mister Gray——"

"Fashin'! Ye maunna say that again, Jeanie, unless ye want me never to come here ony mair."

"Be it as you will then, Mister Gray."

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"That's richt. But what gars ye aye ca' me Mister Gray noo? Ye didna use to do that when ye were a wee lassie, and I used to bring ye sweeties and whiles gie ye a ride on my powny. Od, it sounds queer in my lugs, when naebody ever ca's me ought but Cairnieford or Robin Gray. I'm thinking, Jeanie, ye're getting unco fine in your ways."

And he smiled good-naturedly as he bade her good night, as if he were not altogether displeased to discover that she was different from other lasses, even in such a small matter as a form of address.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE FARMER OF CAIRNIEFORD.

"There's auld Rob Morris that wons in yon glen,  
He's the king o' guid fellows and wale o' auld men:  
He has gowd in his coffers, and owsen and kine,  
And ae bonnie lassie, his darling and mine."—*Burns*.

BUT the respectful distance Jeanie preserved in speaking to him was not so much on account of any idea of the politeness due from a poor fisherman's daughter to a well-to-do farmer like him of Cairnieford, as on account of a certain shyness with which his own conduct had inspired her.

Robin Gray was not a man to hide any of the sentiments of his nature. If he liked a person he showed it, and if he disliked anybody he showed it quite as freely. For instance, he disliked the Laird of Clashgirn; and although McWhapple was the proprietor of the lands Robin farmed, he had shown his contempt for him in various disagreeable ways. But Robin was the best farmer in the country, he had a well-stocked steading, and his rent was always ready at twelve o'clock on the term day. So the Laird lifted his rent, and whatever he might have felt or thought he said nothing.

On the other hand, Robin was fond of Jeanie. He had watched her growing up from a healthy bairn to a bonnie thrifty woman, and he had said to himself one day she would

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make a good wife to some honest chield. By what process of reasoning he arrived at the idea that he himself might be that honest chield, it is not easy to explain.

Usually such conclusions are obtained at a leap, in defiance of logic—the reasoning, if it come at all, coming afterward, when it must perforce arrive at the result previously fixed upon. At any rate Robin got it into his head that he would dearly like Jeanie to become mistress of Cairnieford. He had a “bein” house, he was not altogether an evil-disposed person, and although his years certainly did remove him from the category of youthful suitors—he being about thirty years her senior—still he was a hale hearty fellow, likely to last for thirty years more, and then he would be able to leave her well provided for.

Robin became conscious that there were a great many grey hairs in his head and amongst his whiskers. He had never till then realized the fact that he was growing old; and that fact, although it was not sufficiently powerful to make him forego his new desire, delayed the declaration which otherwise he would have made at once.

Every time he saw Jeanie he became more and more painfully sensible of the disparity of their years; more and more sensible of the ridicule which the folk would be apt to cast upon the “auld man and his young dearie.”

He hesitated, and whilst he hesitated the passion of the man’s heart was gaining that strength of love which makes a Hercules of a pigmy; that strength which overrides all other feelings, hopes, and aims, and blinds the lover to all consequences of good or ill.

He had not spoken of this to Jeanie or her parents, and he did not fancy that it was suspected by them. But the good dame had more than once thought to herself that her daughter might be mistress of Cairnieford if she liked, and that she might be couthie and comfortable there.

As for Jeanie, she noticed certain queer wistful looks with which Robin had lately regarded her; and although she was in no way vain, she suspected their meaning with intuitive

delicacy. She tried by increased respect and distance in speaking to him to let him understand that any hopes he might have of winning her could never be realized. That was why she called him "mister," and that was why she was almost afraid to accept any favour from him.

Robin did not comprehend this; and as his passion became stronger, and the difficulties in the way became consequently less in his eyes, the probability is that he would have spoken several weeks before Adam Lindsay's accident, had not James Falcon, two days previous to his conversation with the Laird, told Robin Gray that he was to marry Jeanie.

Falcon was puzzled by the quick way in which Robin asked him if the lassie had agreed; and then huskily wished him joy, and suddenly left him.

The farmer had gone home that day with a bowed head, a position in which nobody had seen him since his mother's burial, twenty years ago nearly. He took a good deal of toddy that night, and he got up next morning with a headache.

He went about the farm all day in such a queer state that all his servants noticed that there was "something wrang wi' the maister." He was little better on the day following, and his housekeeper asked him if there was anything the matter. From that moment he got better, so far as outward appearance could indicate.

He had brought all the strength of a really strong and generous nature to bear upon the subject, and he had said to himself—

" Gif I can jist help to make her happy that'll be enough for me. If I can jist feel that I hae dune something to make her life smoother than it might be without my help, an' I can see her noo and again smilin' and prosperous, that will satisfy me. Sae I'll help James Falcon to stock his farm, an' do what I can to prosper him, in spite o' that auld beggar the Laird."

When he had reached that kindly resolution, he was more at ease within himself, and the darkness which he had felt closing upon him when the hope that had grown so strong was crushed, began to lighten.

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But Falcon did not get the farm ; and before Robin had another opportunity of seeing him and offering that assistance which might have altered his whole plans, he was away in the *Colin* with Ivan Carrach.

When Robin heard the news—and Adam Lindsay was his informant—he was amazed and puzzled. But his determination did not swerve. He had no thought of taking advantage of his rival's absence. Plain and straight-forward in act and thought, Falcon's absence or presence made no difference to him, once Jeanie had given her word to become his wife.

He would wait till Falcon came back, and then he would set the young folk up; for James was an honest lad, and likely to do well. Meanwhile he could watch over Jeanie, and see her sometimes, and comfort her when she was in trouble. That was all the pleasure he could hope for now, and he tried to be satisfied with it.

Never a word, never a hint of that old yearning which he was trying so bravely to bury in his heart, escaped him. He knew that Adam and his wife were friendly toward him, and that if he were only to speak, they would willingly use their influence with their daughter to persuade her to break off with Falcon ; but Robin could not see how that would further her happiness, which was his chief object. Besides, he had a sturdy pride which would not permit him to rob another man of his promised wife, even if the lass were ready to be a party to the robbery, which she certainly would not be in the present case. He knew too that he had a sufficiently jealous disposition to make himself and his wife miserable, if he suspected that another lived who had a greater share in her thoughts than himself.

So he set himself sturdily to the task before him ; to make the most pleasure he could out of his wrecked hope and to further her happiness.

But Jeanie had only divined the nature of the passion with which he regarded her ; she knew nothing of the sharp pangs with which he had first heard of her betrothal to Falcon ; of the agony he had undergone, and the brave manhood which had

lifted him above the meaner issues of human nature under such circumstances ; and, consequently, she misinterpreted almost everything he said and did. On that account, when she gave her promise to apply to him whenever she might need help, she had no intention of troubling him unless dire necessity compelled her.

That dire necessity arrived much sooner than might have been expected. The morning after the storm was misty and unsettled ; and although the wind had abated, the sea was still moving restlessly, and murmuring a doleful requiem over the mischief of the previous night.

Jeanie had been attending to her father all night, only obtaining an occasional nap on one of the wooden chairs which she had drawn close to the bed.

Adam was awake by daylight. He was feverish and thirsty ; and Jeanie thought that the best thing for him would be a coggieful of new milk.

She went out to the byre, which was a thin shed of wood. She was not surprised to see that the storm had used it roughly. The door had been wrenched from its hinges, and lay broken upon the ground. But when she entered and found that Crummie was gone, she stared about her, wondering where the cow could have got to. Crummie was a staid beast, and one not likely to break from her fastenings.

"The tether's got loose some way, and seeing the door open, she's gaen out to the grass," was Jeanie's thought.

She looked for the cow up and down the road, but could not see her ; and then she was afflicted with the thought that Crummie had got into the water somehow, and been drowned.

She ran down to the beach, but could not find any hoof marks. She ran back again to the byre ; and again to the road. This time she observed on a soft piece of ground beside the long stalks of kale, some of which had been trampled down, the marks of Crummie's hoofs leading to the road. What was most remarkable, she also observed here the impress of a man's feet. It was not until then that the idea of robbery entered her head, and it puzzled her greatly when it did

Hens had been stolen often by the tinker gipsies who had been in the town on market-day; but to steal a whole cow, which could neither have its neck thrawn nor be hidden in an auld pock as a chuckie could, was a degree of audacity that she could only associate with the regular reivers, whose deeds she had been made acquainted with by old wives' gossip.

Stupefied by this apparent loss, and not knowing how to act, she re-entered the house. Adam was groaning and grumbling miserably. Jeanie made him a drink with some oatmeal, and he asked for milk. She was obliged to tell him at once that she believed Crummie had been taken away.

"Ta'en awa!" groaned Adam, looking as angrily at his daughter as if she had been an accomplice in the theft; "Ta'en awa!—how could ony body take her awa?—she was na a wee thing to be jammed in a tinkler's pouch."

"Na, faither, but they hae jist gart her walk awa, and the storm was blawing sae loud that I heard nae disturbance."

"The cow ta'en awa!" gasped the wounded man, writhing with pain: "it's no possible."

"May be sae, faither. I hope sae, and as soon as I hae made your breakfast I'll gang out and look again."

But although she looked again and again, it was without any better result. Adam groaned and grumbled; bewailing the ruin that was falling upon him in his old age with a savage bitterness. Mrs. Lindsay was in a state of dumb consternation for awhile; and when Jeanie managed to draw her into the kitchen on the big chair, she endeavoured to soothe her husband by telling him meekly it was the Lord's will.

Adam admitted that, but he only grumbled louder the more she tried to soothe him; and when Robin Gray arrived, he found Jeanie excited and troubled beyond measure.

He took the matter in hand at once. He consoled the guidwife with the help of a basket he had brought containing a lump of ham, a lot of eggs, and a bottle of real French brandy. He consoled Adam by telling him that he would find the cow or catch the thief.

"An' he'll be hanged," cried Adam, with a tone of satis-

faction in spite of his pain : " an' serve him weel for robbin' a puir man like me."

Jeanie's excitement was certainly subdued, but her face was sad and weariful when she thanked Robin for all he had done.

" Whisht ye, lass," he said cheerfully. " Ye maunna speak o' that, and ye maunna be so downcast. Losh, it's roused your faither and done him a waird o' guid. He'll be out o' his bed in a day or twa. I'll gang down to Geordie Armstrong and set him after Crummie."

Robin proceeded at once to the watchman, Geordie Armstrong, who was an old pensioner, and who represented in his own person the chief constable and entire force of the district, and was not a little proud of his position.

He took the matter up gravely, examined the premises with much precision, and then leisurely proceeded to seek the thief. But nobody was at all surprised that he discovered neither cow nor thief.

Adam was not able to leave his bed in a couple of days, as Robin had hopefully predicted ; and the doctor said it would probably be months before he could use his arm again, and was doubtful if it would ever be quite right, seeing that such injuries are slow to heal in an old man.

Misfortune was falling fast and heavy upon the fisherman's house ; and Jeanie shrunk from telling Robin the real state of affairs. Bad as he knew them to be, he did not know that she was killing the hens day by day to supply her parents with food, and that she was looking with terrible anxiety to a day that was close at hand, when she would have no means left of obtaining for them bare subsistence.

Only those who have felt what hunger is, who have experienced the bitter shame of utter poverty, can understand the agony the poor girl was suffering while she tended mother and father, striving to hide her own misery to lighten theirs.

## CHAPTER VI.

## FOES IN THE DARK.

"When lightning parts the thunder cloud  
That blackens all the sea,  
And tempests sough through sail and shroud,  
E'en then I'll think on thee."—*Professor Wilson.*

JAMES FALCON set himself bravely to the work in hand. The prize he had to win was for Jeanie ; and for her sake there was no labour too great, no difficulty so huge, that he would not master it. He had said that the thought of her would give him strength ; and it had been no idle utterance of passion ; for he accomplished the work of two men on board the brig.

He wanted money, and he set himself with a fierce earnestness to gain it. Not that the money had any share in his thoughts on its own account ; he thought only of the bright home it was to provide for him and Jeanie.

Ivan Carrach, with his great protruding calf's eyes, watched his new hand with a stolid stare. He found that instead of having to put him through an apprenticeship, Falcon was not only as thoroughly acquainted with a sailor's duty as any of the men on board, but had also some knowledge of navigation, as was apparent before two days had elapsed.

Whether the skipper was pleased or the reverse by this discovery it was impossible to guess, for his sodden features in their bush of red hair were as expressionless as a cow's. He spoke little, but he drank much. That, however, seemed to have no effect upon him, except to make his eyes roll more. The drink, which would have made a man of ordinary constitution incapable of standing or speaking, seemed to drop to Carrach's feet, and render them heavier and steadier than usual.

Hutcheson, the mate, told Falcon that "the skipper was aye soberest when he was drunkest."

The truth of this paradox was illustrated in many ways ; and whenever he had been drinking hardest, Carrach always

exhibited the greatest care for the brig, and insisted most upon every man doing his duty. At such times he would make a tour of inspection, and wherever he found anything wrong or anything undone, the men were rated with a volley of oaths.

"Yor're a set o' lazy Hielan brutes—pe-tam," was his usual peroration, apparently quite oblivious of his own nativity.

The hands on board numbered seven—the mate, Falcon, four other men, and a boy. Falcon observed that notwithstanding the skipper's eccentric ways, the men seemed to like him.

He observed too, and with some chagrin, that the men had taken a dislike to himself, for what reason he could not imagine. From the first hour that he had joined them he had been frank and friendly with them, as it was his nature to be with whoever he might be brought into contact. Yet they had not taken kindly to him from the first, and he soon became oppressed with the conviction that his comrades regarded him with suspicion and distrust, as if they fancied that he had come amongst them with no good intent.

On the fifth day out, and whilst a heavy fog was gathering around them, he reviewed his conduct, but he failed to discover anything in it which could promote ill-will amongst the men, unless they had taken a grudge against him for being so ready to take the place of the man who had refused to sail on the Friday.

That was the only ground upon which they could have founded their ill-humour, so far as he was able to make out. It seemed a poor ground for spite, seeing that even if the man had sailed, Falcon would still have been with them. That there was spite he could not doubt, for it was displayed in many ways. The men seemed to shrink from him. If they were talking together, and he approached, the conversation instantly ceased, and the men who had been laughing the moment before at some jest, moved away to their respective posts with sullen faces.

The mate, Hutcheson, was the only one who was at all

friendly with him, and even he was frequently dry and reserved in speaking to him. It was a puzzle, and trying to solve it Girzie Todd's singular warning recurred to him. But that only made the puzzle appear the more intricate. So he spoke to the mate.

"What's wrang wi' the lads, Hutcheson; they seem to look on me as a kind of merman, that had brought mischief aboard?"

"Aye, do they?" answered Hutcheson, as he coiled a rope. "Weel, ye see you're different frae them. They feel as though ye werena just ane o' themsel's."

"What for should they think that? I gie them nae cause."

"Aye, maybe no; but ye see they ken ye're a frien' o' the owner's, an' they maybe hae a notion that ye might clash about onyongoings that michtna be just according to rule."

"What! me?" cried Falcon, laughing. "Weel, if they only ken'd how little friendship there is between the Laird and me, and in what way we parted, they would soon get rid of that notion."

"I'm glad to hear ye say't," answered Hutcheson, more freely than he had yet spoken; "for even the skipper himsel' was disposed to think ye were here to keep an e'e on a' thing, and himsel' in particular."

"Deil tak' him, did he think I would come here as a spy for ony man? I'll set that richt."

Falcon was indignant at the idea of having been regarded as a spy, and he told the mate his reasons for going to sea, and how he had quarrelled with the Laird. He afterwards spoke to his comrades, and his explanation produced a better understanding between them than there had been since he had joined them.

He spoke to the skipper later in the day, not quite so frankly, perhaps, as he had done to the mate and the others, for Carrach had not made a favourable impression on him.

Ivan listened in his stolid way, rolling his eyes all the while, and when he had finished, said gruffly—

"You'll pe all the better liked for no peing what we thocht. Yes, pe-tam. Hae a drink?"

Falcon declined the horn cup which was tendered to him half full of brandy and water; but he was glad to think that he was likely to have a smooth course with his comrades. The expectation was soon dispelled.

The fog had been deepening all the afternoon, and Carrach had been keeping pace with the fog in drinking—that is, the blacker the fog grew the more he drank.

Toward evening, whilst a man named Donald was at the helm, the brig was suddenly overshadowed by some black mass ahead, much denser than the fog. Falcon sprang aft, and before Donald could utter a word, had ported the helm; and as the brig veered from her course she grated along the side of a huge vessel which crawled slowly by.

There was a moment of breathless consternation; then wild shouts from those on board the unknown vessel and the hands of the brig. A babble that rose above the lashing of waves, and the creaking of timbers; and with it a confused rush of feet.

The danger was over when Carrach got on deck. He swore at everybody, and then he took Falcon aside, and asked him to explain what had happened. The absurdity of first making a row, and then asking for an explanation, did not strike Falcon at the moment, and he briefly told him that being forward he had observed the black shadow; suspected what it was, and, fearing that Donald might not observe it until too late on account of the darkness, he had hastened to the helm.

None of his comrades had heard what he was saying, but they were standing in a group round Donald, casting sullen glances toward Falcon, as if suspecting that he was blaming them.

Carrach advanced to Donald with his eyes rolling and a string of oaths on his tongue, although his face was stolid as usual.

"What ta deevil did you'll mean by quitting your helm?" he growled.

"I didna quit the helm," answered Donald, surly.

"It's a tam lee,—oich ! but you'll tell me that to my face whan here's Falcon, wha saved us frae going to smash all together, told me that you was not there."

"It's a lee he's telling," shouted Donald and his two mates.

"I never said so," cried Falcon, breaking in indignantly ; "and you know it, Carrach. I told you that Donald was at his post, but the fog prevented him from seeing the danger so soon as I did."

Carrach turned his eyes upon him, not in the slightest degree disturbed by the flat contradiction of his falsehood.

"Did you'll no told me that Donald was awa frae the helm whan you took hold of her?"

"No," retorted Falcon ; as much amazed by the man's placidity as by the apparently objectless lie.

"Well, all I say is that what you'll told me standing ayont there, was not like what you'll told me noo. Come doon stair, Donald; an' hae a spoke wi' me."

"Bide a minute," said Falcon, confronting him, "bide a minute, Ivan Carrach, and hearken to me. I'm no a fool, and I'm no blind. I hae seen that the lads here had some ill-will against me. I ken noo wha has made that ill-will, though I cannot tell what for."

"What is't you'll mean ?" demanded Carrach, his dirty fat hands swinging like two weights by his sides.

"This is what I mean, mates," addressing the men, although still confronting the master, "our skipper wants to make ill-blood atween you and me, whatever reason he has for't ; but before ye condemn me, mind this—I never said a bad word of ony o' ye, and I never thought of doing so."

"Did you'll ken what you was doing enow ?" queried Ivan, rolling his eyes in the fashion of a cow chewing a sweet cud.

"Telling the truth."

"Maybo so, but you'll be also making ta mutiny on ta high seas, and the law says a man wha'll be make the mutinies

shall be hanged—pe-tam—so shust mind what you're about, my praw lad."

He pushed by him and rolled down to his cabin, followed by Donald.

When the latter returned to the deck, he regarded Falcon with a sullen growl, as if he had been satisfied of his attempt to defame him. He apparently succeeded in convincing his comrades also, for in a short while the brown faces of the men were darkened with suppressed passion. More than one of them muttered an ejaculation of anger when he rubbed shoulders with Falcon.

Hutcheson, however, was still friendly ; and after he had left the helm—which he had taken when Donald had gone down with the skipper—he whispered to Falcon—

" I heard what ye said to the skipper, and I ken that what ye tauld the lads was true. But what the deil he's drivin' at I canna make oot."

" Then why did you not speak when you heard him telling the lie ? "

Hutcheson shrugged his shoulders.

" There was nae use making bad waur. The lads, being prejudiced against ye, would ha'e believed him in spite of us baith. Sae that it would ha'e dune ye nae guid, and maybe it would ha'e dune me harm. But for a' that I'll speak a word for ye when it's needed."

That seemed to Falcon a kind of backhanded way of doing justice, but he said no more. The puzzle he had found on board the *Colin* was becoming so hopelessly involved that he saw little prospect of solving it. The falsehood of Carrach seemed as purposeless as the prejudice of the men was groundless ; yet both threatened to give him much trouble.

He did not turn into his hammock that night at his usual hour, but lay down on a heap of canvas near the forecastle hatch. He was out of humour and depressed ; he wished to be alone ; he did not care to be amongst his comrades in his present mood ; and so seeing the canvas there he stretched himself upon it instead of going down the hatchway to his

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hammock. It was one of those trivial acts which in nine hundred and ninety-nine instances is never remembered, because it bears no issue, but in which the thousandth instance is fraught with gravest consequences.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FATE OF THE "COLIN."

"I left thee in sorrow;  
But, oh, on the morrow,  
I cherish'd the hope thee again I wad see."  
—J. G. Cumming.

A HEAVY wind was sweeping the dense fog before it, so that about midnight stars became visible. Falcon lay watching them, thinking of Jeanie, and finding some comfort in the thought that those same stars were looking down on her. That was a link between them in spite of all the waste of land and sea which separated them.

Somehow the fortune he was seeking—and it was not a big one, only enough to stock a small farm—had never seemed so far from him as it did to-night. The difficulties he had to surmount were sterner, the chances of success fewer, than they had ever appeared before. But he was not losing courage: he had not the remotest thought of yielding; he was only a little weary, and rested by the wayside to calculate what a short space he had journeyed on the long road he had yet to traverse.

The brig was cutting through the water with a swishing sound, the wind was whistling shrilly through the rigging, when suddenly her very timbers seemed to quiver with the sharp cry which rose upon the night.

"FIRE!"

Falcon bounded to his feet, and ran toward the mate's berth, whence the cry proceeded.

He met Hutcheson frenziedly rushing with a bucket for

water. Falcon seized another bucket, and having filled it, followed Hutcheson to his berth. An old sea chest in which various stores were kept was in a blaze. They emptied the water upon it, and, with the speed of men who knew that their lives depended upon their exertions, procured more. The flame had not obtained any hold on the surrounding wood-work, so that they had succeeded in extinguishing it with half a dozen bucketsful of water, by which time they were joined by Carrach, Donald, and two others.

The skipper was dressed exactly as he had been during the day. He had either not gone to bed at all, or he had lain down with his clothes on. He held a large lantern in one of his hands, and with its light he surveyed the men around him.

"What way did all this come about?" he growled, "and wha's been trying to burn us all?"

"I dinna ken how it happened," replied Hutcheson excitedly. "I was turning in after my watch, and when I came here I found the kist bleezing. If I'd been three minutes later there would have been nae chance o' getting it out, for yon jar o' oil would hae been afire, and then we might hae said guid nicht to the *Colin*."

"Did you'll leave nothing that could hae started the fire?"

"Naething. The place was a' richt when I was here for some oil about half an hour syne."

"Then here's what I hae gotten to say," broke in Donald, clenching his fist furiously, and looking hard at Falcon; "there's some damned scoon'rel amang us that wants to work mischief tae us a', and if I had my will I'd hae Jeames Falcon boun' hand and foot, an' see if there was ony mair cantrips played us after that."

"And what for would we do that?" said Carrach.

"Because he's the only ane that was out o' his hammock when he ought to hae been in it. He hasna been i' the fore-castle the nicht."

Even Hutcheson looked suspiciously at Falcon now. The latter admitted that he had not gone below, and tried to

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explain, but the explanation appeared weak and untruthful to those who heard it. Falcon's indignation only made matters worse.

The skipper closed the dispute.

"We'll no touch him this time, lads, so go about your business all o' you: but if any more tam nonsense goes on we'll put him in airns, we will—pe-tam."

Carrach rolled back to his cabin, which was close to the mate's berth. Donald and his two comrades went forward muttering darkly, and Hutcheson shut his door.

Falcon understood by that movement that the one friend he had on board had turned against him like the rest. He moved slowly away, his brain feverishly excited as much by the danger they had escaped as by the singular manner in which circumstances seemed to conspire against him.

He halted by the mast, and leaning against it, his hand clutching one of the ropes to steady himself, he stood there with the strong wind beating upon his cheeks whilst he tried to bring his thoughts into shape.

One idea he grasped firmly, that Carrach had some mysterious purpose for the bold lies he had told; and also for refusing to adopt Donald's suggestion. But what could that purpose be?

He had been half an hour trying to answer the question, when he suddenly bent forward and peered eagerly through the dim light towards some bulky object which had crawled out from the entrance to the skipper's cabin.

The object crawled along the deck to the hatchway of the hold,—raising the hatch cautiously, and disappeared.

Falcon darted down to the cabin. The door was open, but the place was quite dark. He groped about and assured himself that Carrach was not there.

Up the ladder again, and he shook the door of the mate's crib.

"Hutcheson, get up, man, quick," he said in a sharp undertone.

In a moment Hutcheson opened the door.

"What the deil's wrang noo," he said ill-humouredly when he saw who had roused him.

"Speak low. I hae discovered the mischief-maker."

"Eh? Then it's no yourself?"

"Come and see."

He led him over to the main hatch and bade him stand close behind it. They waited nearly a quarter of an hour, and the mate was becoming impatient. He was on the point of asking angrily what Falcon meant, when the hatch was raised slightly from below, then stopped, as if the person who had raised it were looking for a clear course.

Falcon gripped his companion's arm to impose silence.

The hatch was pushed up farther, and a dark object crawled out. As soon as the hatch closed Falcon stepped over it and planted himself before the man.

Ivan Carrach stood upright then, and drew from under his jacket his lantern, the light of which he had been concealing. His big ball-like eyes rolled fiercely upon Falcon. Then he reached out his hand and grasped him by the throat.

"So," he growled in a thick husky voice, "I'll hae got you at it again, my praw lad. You'll hae been watchin' me maybe, but you'll got the worst o' that—pe-tam."

He was about to raise an alarm when he saw the mate, who was staring at him in a puzzled way.

Carrach seemed dumbfounded, and then his whole manner changed. He released Falcon.

"You was there with him, Hutcheson?" he said in his ordinary stolid manner.

"Aye, I'm here."

"Oich, then, it was all richt. I was feart when I saw him there alone that there was something wrang again. I haue been making a round to see that all was safe."

"Aye; but ye hae a queer way o' gaun about it, *as though* ye were feart o' being seen."

"So I was. I did not want onybody to know, *because* if onybody did know I wouldno hae found them out."

"And was all safe below?"



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"Yes—aye, all safe. You can roost again. It's all richt—pe-tam."

He made for his cabin with a speed he had never displayed before.

Falcon and Hutcheson looked at each other, but spoke no word. Hutcheson moved slowly to his berth. Falcon followed. At the door they stopped.

"I want to bide wi' you the nicht, Hutcheson," said Falcon.

The mate nodded assent, and they entered. Falcon seated himself on a small box and leaned his back against the side of the door. The mate, before lying down on his narrow couch, closed the door, and they were in darkness.

The brig rocked under the heavy wind, and the waters lashed its sides angrily. After half an hour of silence, Falcon spoke.

"Are you sleeping, Hutcheson?"

"No. Confound it, I canna sleep, whatever's the matter wi' me."

"You'll not forget the way he crawled out of the hold, trying to hide the lantern?"

"No likely."

"And you'll not forget the confused way he answered you?"

"No."

"And, most important of all, you'll not forget that he assured you twice that all was safe?"

"I'll mind a'. But what are ye thinking about?"

"*That Carrach does not want the Colin to make her voyage.*"

"What?" and the mate started as the words were whispered in his ear. But the shock only lasted for a moment. "Hoots, ye're haverin' noo."

And he lay down again. Falcon made no response, and there was silence between them for another half-hour. At the expiry of that time Hutcheson put his feet on the floor and rose to a sitting posture.

"Deevil tak' me if I can get a wink o' sleep," he muttered discontentedly. "What wi' thinking about ae thing and

anither I'm a' out in a sweat. I'm as drouthy as a fish, an' I feel as if the place was het as an oven."

"Will I open the door? That will give us air and light too, for it must be near daybreak."

"Od, I would think sae" (yawning and stretching himself). "It seems a lang while since ye spoke last, and yet it canna be mair nor an hour—*MY GOD, WHAT'S THAT?*"

Falcon had thrown open the door, which admitted a faint light, sufficient to enable them to see the outline of each other's persons when they stood opposite the doorway. Both were standing so now, listening to the sound which had excited Hutcheson's exclamation, and caused them to spring to their feet at the same moment.

It was a peculiar hissing and spluttering sound like that produced by throwing water on fire. The rocking of the brig, the bluster of the wind, and the roar of the waves, had prevented them hearing it sooner.

Hutcheson darted outside, and looked eagerly round. He could see nothing; but the heat he had felt inside his cabin was perceptible on the deck also. He shouted to the man at the rudder and the look-out—was there anything wrong? The answer came from both—no. Suddenly the helmsman added:—

"There's a queer soun' somewhar that I canna make out."

Falcon seized the mate's arm. They regarded each other fixedly, and the same idea seemed to have struck both, for they rushed together to the main hatchway.

They lifted the hatch together, and a dense volume of smoke rushed upward, blinding them. They dropped the hatch immediately and drew back, rubbing their eyes. Hutcheson's face was white as a sheet, and his body shivering.

"She's bleezing like hell," he gasped.

Hutcheson was a stout-hearted fellow, and he had been wrecked twice, but he was so overwhelmed with consternation at the sight of the hold in flames, that for the moment he was powerless to move when action, prompt and decisive, was most needed.

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Falcon was the cooler of the two—probably because his experience did not enable him to realize so quickly the full horror of the position.

“Call the men—try the buckets—there may be a chance yet,” he shouted, and the mate started as if a trumpet had sounded the call to duty in his ears.

He hallooed to the helmsman and the look-out, giving them rapid orders to rouse their comrades and the skipper. The one word “fire!” acted like an electric shock upon the men, and they rushed wildly to obey the command.

Hutcheson and Falcon had got the buckets ready by the time the crew, half dressed and with pallid startled faces, joined them. Even at that moment, when one terrible element of destruction was threatening to cast them upon the mercy of another, the men regarded Falcon with looks of savage hate and suspicion. He was the man who had betrayed them to the approaching doom.

But there was no time for words. The hissing and spluttering sounds had become louder and louder, the heat of the deck intense, and when Carrach appeared—dressed as the mate and Falcon had last seen him—a broad tongue of flame shot up through the hatchway.

“Pe-tam!” was all he said; and in a second he was amongst the crew working with as much will, apparently, as any, and with a great deal more stolid calmness.

Hutcheson and Falcon had been the first to dip the buckets; and the water was passed from hand to hand with a rapidity which only men making a desperate effort for life could have exhibited.

They worked madly and in silence. Carrach stood nearest the fire, as stolid in the presence of death as he would have been sitting in safety before a dram-bottle.

But ten minutes sufficed to prove, even to his dull intellect, that their work was hopeless. The flame, suppressed at one point, burst forth more furiously at another. The timbers were crackling, seething, and spluttering under their feet: and it was manifest that the fire had obtained such hold

of the vessel as would defy their most desperate exertions to extinguish it.

The morning haze was presently illumined by a broad glare of light that was reflected in the waters around them, so that they seemed to be encompassed by a sea of flame. The relentless fire had greedily seized upon the ribs of the brig, the deck, the masts, and the rigging. Dense gusts of smoke rolled upward, enveloping the men, blinding and blackening them. The smoke was followed by broad flames that shot out fiery tongues toward them with the hissing sound of a thousand venomous snakes.

A portion of the deck fell crashing downward into the fiery pit; and then the wind caught up the flame and smoke and swept them across the vessel with a roaring wrath that deafened and dazed the wretched victims.

Bright flames gathering strength and volume around them, a wide dark sea beyond, and a gloomy haze obscuring the sky overhead, the men stood face to face with death in its most horrible form, and despair seized them. As with one accord they cast down the buckets and gave up the strife.

"Out wi' the boats," cried Donald; and the men, not caring who gave the order, snatched at the hope which the words held out to them, and rushed with hoarse mad shrieks to the boats.

There were two; but one of them was already in the grasp of the fire; the other was lowered instantly. Hutcheson cast into it a small barrel of biscuits, Donald a barrel of water, and Carrach, from some unknown quarter, produced a keg of brandy. He was not making the least effort to direct the crew. In his heavy way he was now entirely occupied in attending to his own safety, leaving the others to take care of their own respectively.

He was the first in the boat, Hutcheson the last but one, and as soon as he had descended, Donald shouted wildly,—

"Put aff; there's room for nae mair."

Falcon was bending over the side of the brig, about to slip down the rope, when this order was given.

Two men raised oars to obey, but Hutcheson pushed one of them roughly back, and held firmly by the rope.

"No, damn ye," he shouted, with a savageness of look and voice the effect of which his begrimed visage heightened, "ye sha' not leave a man that's done his duty as weel's the best o' ye to die while there's a chance o' rescue. Come on, Falcon."

"It was him set the brig a-low'e," cried Donald doggedly.

"It's a lee," retorted Hutcheson, holding fast by the rope.

"The compass and the log," shouted Carrach, rousing suddenly, "ye hae time yet, Falcon—they're in my berth—there's no chance for us without the compass."

Falcon was willing to perform any act, however fool-hardy, that might satisfy the men he was innocent of the crime attributed to him. With an idea that he would obtain this result by showing his readiness to risk his life for theirs, he disappeared from the bulwark at once to comply with the skipper's command.

He did not hear Hutcheson hallooing after him to come back, in the hope of checking him in the rash venture he had too readily undertaken. It was certainly an act of such foolhardiness as only the excitement of the occasion rendered it possible for a sane man to attempt.

In flame and smoke he disappeared, and the crew, who had been only a moment before ready to push off without him, now waited in breathless silence for his return. Hutcheson held the rope, and watched eagerly for the least sign of his coming.

Meanwhile the greedy flames, fanned to fury by the wind, were rapidly devouring the brig. With a loud crash the mainmast toppled over, and fell like a huge firebrand into the water. Luckily it went over the larboard side, or it might have crushed the small boat and its freight.

The rocking of the craft at this juncture seemed to intimate that she was settling down. This time Carrach spoke.

"You'll better hold awa', lads, or we'll go doon wi' the suction o' her."

"Aye, aye, put aff," shouted Donald gruffly; "there's nae

use throwing awa seven lives for the sake o' ane. We can stand clear eneuch to be safe oursel's, an' if Falcon shows up he can loup, and we can pick him up. Let go, Hutcheson."

"Haud on a minute yet," was the mate's uneasy answer, clutching the rope tightly, as he raised his voice and shouted with all his pith to Falcon.

The brig gave an ominous lurch toward them, and the crew yelled in chorus to Hutcheson to let go. He had no option now, for even if he had been disposed to continue faithful to Falcon in opposition to his comrades, he could not, for the rope had caught fire, and dropped down to his hand.

With another yell the men pulled away from the *Colin*. What was the life of one man to them, weighed in the balance against their own? It is in such terrible moments as these that the best and worst natures show themselves pure and undisguised.

They were, however, so far willing to serve the absent man that they ceased rowing as soon as they had got beyond danger of the whirlpool the brig would make in sinking.

They had scarcely done so when there was an explosion like the outburst of a thunderbolt, and they were covered with a shower of sparks and flaming splinters. The body of the brig had been burst open, and reeling backward from the shock, her bow rose out of the water, and she plunged down stern first.

By the time the crew had rubbed their eyes, and the black clouds of smoke had been sufficiently dispersed by the wind to enable them to see, barrels, spars, torn pieces of charred wood-work and portions of rigging were all that was left of the *Colin*.

"Oich, it was shust the barrel o' pooter in my cabin gied that last blaw," said Carrach, rubbing his face with his sleeve; "and if Falcon did mak' the lowe, he's paid for it noo. So let's forget and, forgive—pe-tam. Row awa, lads, we're no far frae land."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE NEWS BROUGHT HOME.

"Dark lowers the night o'er the wide stormy main,  
Till mild rosy morning rise cheerful again ;  
Alas ! morn returns to revisit the shore,  
But Connel returns to his Flora no more."—*A. Wilson.*

THE healthy bloom had faded from Jeanie's cheeks, and left behind a weary expression that made her appear five years older than she had done on the day the *Colin* sailed. Anxieties were pressing heavily upon her; the strife for bare subsistence had come. She met the struggle with a brave heart at first, and by daybreak she was spinning, knitting hose, or making nets.

But as day by day the difficulties seemed to increase rather than diminish, in spite of all her labour, her heart began to sicken and sink.

Worse still, Adam, who complained much whilst obliged to keep his bed, was still more discontented with his lot when he had sufficiently recovered to be able to sit by the fireside, and on fine days at the door. Hunger and pain make a short temper, and not seeing that Jeanie was doing anything more than he had a right to expect from a daughter, he was apt to speak harsh words to her at times; to utter impatient ejaculations when she was dressing his wound, and to complain of her unskilfulness.

She was worried alike by this impatience and the daily shifts for food, until at last her own temper began to break bounds, and she once or twice resented his complaints. But this was only when, wearied out by her exertions, the carping of her father irritated her beyond measure. Even then her resentment went no further than saying—

"Deed, faither, I think ye ought to be thankfu' it's nae waur. An' I'm sure I dae a' that I can, and yet it winna satisfye ye."

Then she would quit him, and relieve herself by cleaning up the house with a spiteful sort of vigour, finding apparently

some comfort in rattling the dishes, and praying fervently for Jeamie's return.

"It's worry, worry, worry, morn, noon, and night," she would say to herself; "and there doesna seem ony getting the better o't."

To crown all, the Laird of Clashgirn called twice about the rent, and there was not a farthing wherewith to help to pay him. Then indeed any life seemed preferable to the life of misery she was leading—misery which all her strength seemed unable to alleviate.

Yet she knew that there was willing and kindly help at hand if she would only ask it. But knowing nothing of Robin Gray's generous resolution, she had strained every nerve to conceal as much of the real distress of the family as possible. Homely and simple as she was, she possessed enough of that sensitive nature which shrinks from help when it is most needed ; because then it seems so like charity, notwithstanding the fact that help in need is help indeed.

No doubt the fancy that Robin Gray's regard was more that of a lover than of a mere friend, was the leading cause of her reserve towards him, and rendered the acceptance of favours from him the more unpleasant, because she felt that they were favours she could never requite as he might desire. She wronged the man by the thought; but how could she know that?

Although he was not aware of the full extent of her difficulties, he knew enough to prompt him to seek every opportunity of relieving them. But he saw that somehow his anxiety to be of service seemed to trouble her. From that moment his desire was restrained, and he was sorely puzzled what to do for her, and how to do it.

"Better the day, Adam ?" said Cairnieford, coming up one bright morning.

The fisherman was seated by the door in the sunlight. His arm was still in splints, and his sallow face with stubble-covered chin and blue lips betokened his feeble condition.

"Oo aye, better, Cairnieford, thank ye; that is, as weel as

can be expeckit in a man as sarely fashed as me, and no able to wark. The doctor says it'll be a while yet afore I get the use o' my arm."

"But ye're gettin' on bawly for a' that, and ye'll come round in time."

He heard the busy hum of Jeanie's wheel, and he glanced eagerly in that direction; so that he did not at first observe the deep wrinkles that gathered on Adam's brow. The voice, however, harsh and husky, recalled his attention.

"Ah! in time, nae doubt. But Lord kens what we're to do biding that time."

"What's wrang, man, what's wrang?"

"Everything's wrang—the cow gane, the auld wife getting waur an' waur, mysel' in this condition, and Jeanie wrought clean aff her feet without making ony better o't. Isna that eneuch to make a man that was never auchtin onyane a penny till noo sour as a crab apple? An' to back it a', there's the Laird hirplin' here day after day about his rent, and nae way that I ken o' to pacify him."

Adam's tongue, once loosened on the subject, soon revealed the whole state of affairs.

"Hoots, man, what way did you no let me ken a' that afore?" said Robin. "I could hae set your mind at ease without ony fash."

"I ken that, Cairnieford," and Adam's withered visage was lightened; "but Jeanie was ay bidding me bear my ain load, an' her mither backit her, an', to tell the truth, I never cared mysel' to be beholden to onyboddy."

"Aye, but you'll except me, Adam" (lowering his voice and bending down). "Just say naething about it and I'll settle wi' the Laird, though I'd rather deal wi' onyboddy but him since we had that dispute about the march fence. But I'll make it a' richt."

Adam gave him a grateful look.

"Thank ye, Cairnieford. I'll be able to pay ye back ——"

"We'll talk about that again. Guid day. I'll be back the morn."

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And Robin, eager to avoid thanks, hurried away, without even waiting to see Jeanie, lest she should object to the new service he was about to render her.

At the steading of Clashgirn he found Girzie Todd's cuddy cart, and Girzie herself was busy haggling with Mrs. Begg about the price of some fish. At the head of the cuddy, one of his arms thrown round its neck, and the other holding up a bundle of hay and thistles, was Girzie's son Wattie.

"Eat awa, Dawnie, for ye dinna ken whan ye'll get ony mair to eat," Wattie was saying, coaxing the cuddy and addressing it, as his mother was in the habit of doing, with as much earnestness as if it had been human.

He was a fair-haired lad—or rather man, for he was as old as James Falcon, and much about the same height and build—with a healthy look. But he had a very marked squint in his eyes, and a certain vacant stare, which betrayed the natural.

Although a man in appearance, he had all the characteristics of a child. And chief amongst them was his terror of being left anywhere by his mother. He was never at ease except when hanging at her skirts; and when on occasions she found it necessary to leave him at home, he would sit moping in a corner until she returned, unless he was moved to perpetrate some childish freak of mischief. Next to his mother, he was attached to Dawnie. These two represented to his weak mind protection and safety. He shrank away from men as if afraid of them. With children he would fain have been friendly, but they made fun of him too often, and mocked him. Lassies of his own years were always as ready as the bairns to make fun of him, although in a different way. Jeanie Lindsay was the only one of them who had treated him with sincere kindness, and consequently she obtained the next place to Dawnie in his estimation.

His jacket and trousers were somewhat tattered; but they bore evidences of having been well patched. His mother had lately bought him a new bonnet, and of that he was so proud that he scarcely ever wore it: preferring to carry it daintily in his pouch or under his arm.

"The laddies would be wantin' to take it frae me an' file it," was his answer, with a sly grin, to a remonstrance from Jeanie.

And it was true that the mischievous urchins of Portlappoch would have enjoyed amazingly the pleasure of making a football of Wattie's new bonnet, and of seeing him run wildly about trying to snatch it from them. They had done it with his old one.

Girzie caught sight of Gray as he approached, and closed the bargain at once with Mrs. Begg by submitting to her offer, much to that worthy woman's amaze, for Girzie was never known to yield a baubee without a hard contest.

"Weel, weel, Mrs. Begg, just tak' them at your ain price," she said on this occasion, "but ye's never get fish like them again at the siller. Come awa, Wattie."

She seized Dawnie's bridle and led him down the road with as much speed as a few smart thuds with the stump of a whip handle could enforce.

"Guid day to ye," said the farmer passing.

"Bide a wee, Cairnieford," she said, "there's ill news came hame this fine mornin' for some folk ye care about."

"What news and whatna folk, guid-wife?"

He looked at her with some surprise, for there was perceptible in her usual brusque manner a degree of agitation.

"The news is that the *Colin* has been burnt at sea, and Jeames Falcon has been droont or burnt wi' her."

"Heaven save's, woman, what are ye saying?"

"What's ower true, I'm thinking. Ivan Carrach landed here this morning wi' the news, and he's up wi' the Laird enow."

"But—are ye sure that Falcon's lost?"

"Speer at the Laird," she said drily, and was moving on.

"But how do you ken this?"

"It's nae matter hoo I ken; speer at the Laird an' Carrach if it binna true, and syne ye can tell Jeanie."

Robin Gray's heart leapt into his mouth at the tidings; and his first thought had been simply of the new affliction

this would bring to Jeanie. His second thought was in a degree selfish, for out of the new misfortune he saw a way by which all her sorrow might be relieved. But when Girzie suggested that he should be the bearer of the fatal news, he started from it in as much alarm as if she had asked him to set fire to the cottage.

"Na, Girzie, I canna do that—I canna do't. But ye're a frien' to baith her an' me. Gang doon that way and let her ken o't, puir lassie, if you're sure its true. I'll see the Laird and Carrach, and if it's no true I'll overtak ye. Break it to her kindly, for I'm feart it'll do her harm."

"I'll do your bidding, Cairnieford, for the sake o' the kind word and gowpen o' meal ye hae aye had for my Wattie. Dinna fear for Jeanie. She's young and hearty an' she'll get ower't a' before lang; an' it's an ill wind fills naebody's sail, even though there be a smell o' brimstone intil't."

Nodding her head, and with a queer grin that had something sad and cynical in it, she strode after Wattie and the cuddy.

Robin Gray insisted peremptorily on seeing the Laird at once. The Laird was so much surprised by the visit—for Gray, although his tenant and neighbour, had not been in the house for years—that he desired him to come ben to the parlour.

Carrach was sitting bolt upright on a chair near the table, upon which his dirty fat hands were resting in proximity to a decanter full of whisky. His shaggy hair was redder and bristlier than ever, and his ox eyes were rolling more stolidly.

The Laird was very much as usual, dry and respectable.

"Glad to see ye, Cairnieford," he 'said, taking a huge pinch of snuff, smiling and nodding affably, "an' houp ye'll no be siccian a stranger as ye hae been. Will ye hae a dram?"

"No, thank ye; I'm for nae drams in this house——"

"Aweel, man, aweel, ye needna be sae thrawn. Ye're welcome here, an' ye'd hae been mair welcome if ye'd come to tell me that bygones were to be bygones atween us. Since it's no that, whatna wind has blown ye this airt?"

"No my ain will, ye may be sure o' that, Laird; although for that matter byganes are byganes wi' me, sae far that I hae nae thocht o' raking them up. I came here to pay ye this six pounds for Adam Lindsay's rent, and when ye hae gien me a quittal for't, I hae a question to speer at ye."

The Laird took another pinch of snuff, examining his impatient and excited visitor shyly with his sleek pale eyes. Evidently cogitating on some new subject for speculation, he took down an inkstand from the mantelpiece, procured half a sheet of note-paper from a drawer, and sat down to write the receipt.

"Od, it's extraordinar!" he exclaimed, with his eyes fixed on the paper; "and so you're going to pay Adam Lindsay's rent? Weel, Adam's an honest chiel, and he's got a bonnie daughter."

"Here are the notes," said Robin briefly, throwing them down. "Count them."

"Oh, they're a' right, I hae no doubt;" and, as if to prove his perfect confidence, he proceeded to count them and examine the water marks with miserly care. "Ye were saying there was a question——"

"Aye," interrupted Robin, turning to Carrach. "I want to ken if it's true that the *Colin* has been lost, and that James Falcon has gane down wi' her."

The Laird produced his large silk handkerchief, and blew his nose with sonorous grief.

Carrach's eyes rolled up to the farmer's face, but his lips did not move.

"It's my great misfortune to hae to confirm the news ye hae heard," answered the Laird with a whining drawl. "Its true—though wha told ye I canna guess, seeing that I didna ken mysel' twa or three minutes syne. The brig was ane o' the best that ever sailed the sea, but she was burnt, and my puir frien', wha was trying to save the papers and log, was either killed wi' the explosion o' a barrel o' powder, or was drooned. Isna that the way o't, Carrach?"

"Oich aye," muttered the skipper, emptying a glass, "he

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was a prave lad, but the splosion was too strong for him—pe-tam."

Robin, after gazing a moment from one to the other of the men, suddenly brought his heavy hand down on the table with a force that made inkstand, decanter, and glasses dance.

"Mind this, McWhapple"—he never called him "Laird" when angry with him. "It's no the first time you and me hae had unpleasant dealings. Thank Heaven, I dinna need to care a snap o' my thum for ye; and I tell ye this, I'll hae the affair looked into, and if there has been ony wrang-doing, I'll find it out."

"Od, it's extraordinar'," ejaculated the Laird, as if his pity for the man's intemperate passion excluded all idea of resenting the insult. "Ye speak as though I would be likely to set my ain house in a lowe about my lugs. But ye shall hae a' the information anent the melancholy business that the insurance agent, lawyer Carnegie, and mysel' can mak' out."

Robin did see that he had spoken harshly; but he made no further apology than this:—

"I'll be thankful for the information, and I hope that wi' what I can learn mysel', it may alter my present opinions. But you ken and I ken, McWhapple, that there are reasons why I should doubt your word—especially when it concerns James Falcon."

Carrach, stolid as an ox, stared and drank. The Laird took an extra pinch. Robin quitted the house.

But he did not attempt to overtake Girzie Todd.

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## CHAPTER IX.

"Oh, wha wad buy a silken gown  
Wi' a puir broken heart?  
Or what's to me a siller croun,  
Gin fra my love I part?"—*S. Blamire.*

"DROONED?"

She repeated the word in a low frightened voice, shrinking from it, and yet repeating it, as if she were trying to realize

its full import by echoing the sound. Her hands were clasped helplessly on her breast. Her eyes looked vacantly across the sea, as if seeking some explanation in the dim distance. She was pitifully dazed and quiet. There was no violent outcry; not the least symptom of hysterics—only that low questioning murmur of the one word which embraced the whole story of her sad loss.

They were standing at the corner of the empty byre, in which she had been hunting for eggs, when Girzie arrived. Wattie was seated on the low stone dyke admiring his new bonnet, and occasionally holding a conversation with Dawnie. Girzie was beside Jeanie, watching her with a certain grim sympathy expressed on her brown visage.

She had given her the sad tidings in the kindest way she could think of, and that had been abruptly enough. She had no skill in beating about the bush; and she believed that when one had anything to tell which must be told, it was better told at once, whether good or bad. But after she had spoken the worst, she remained silent for a long while, to give Jeanie time to recover from the first shock.

"Ye'll just hae to bear 't, Jeanie, like ither folk," she said at last, bluntly; tying an extra knot on the kerchief she wore across her shoulders. "It's hard to think o't at first, I ken; but it's wonnerfu' how ane's sorrow saftens after a day or twa, when a' thing's by help. I mind when Bessie Munro's man gaed doon aff the Plada, Bessie skirtl like a water-kelpie as lang's there was a doubt o' his death; but she got a' richt as sune's she ken'd that it was ayont doubt and nae help for't. She got another man sax months after, an a better ane nor the first into the bargain. I dinna ken ony kind o' article that mends sae sune as a broken heart when there's nae other guid it can do. It's surely a mercifu' arrangement for women folk, seeing their hearts are dunted to bits sae mony times in a life."

Jeanie heard the sharp voice ringing in her ears; but of the meaning of the sound she knew nothing. She turned to Girzie with a stupefied look.

"But it canna—it canna be true," she said, pitifully.  
"There was naebody saw him gae doun."

"There was naebody saw him come up either. Hoots, lassie, ye maunna mak' mair fash for yoursel' wi' expectin' miracles. I hae had mair sorrow in my day wi' houping for what was clean impossible than I hae ever had frae rale misfortin'. But that's the way o' us puir bodies; we aye keep looking at the cloud owerhead that winna come near us, an' fa' into the sheughs at our feet. I would fain say that it canna be true if it would dae ony guid to tell a lee; but it would be a lee, an' ye'd be sae muckle the waur for't come neist year."

"Drooned!" murmured Jeanie again, putting her hands up to her head bewilderedly; "an' he'll never come back ony mair. O Girzie, it's hard to thole; and me was thinking day and nicht o' him coming hame to save us frae a' our troubles. Had it no' been for that, I wouldna hae been able to bear up ava, and noo——"

She sat down on a big stone, and, covering her face with her hands, sobbed bitterly.

Girzie left her there with the parting counsel to remember that "there was as guid fish i' the sea as ever came out o't, whatever ane might think o' their last fishin'."

She went into the house and very briefly informed the old folks of the catastrophe. She did not wait to hear Mrs. Lindsay's usual apostrophe on all calamities, or to answer the numerous questions Adam was eager to ask about the event.

"I hae my day's wark afore me yet, for I haena sauld half my fish this morning," she said, turning away; and stopping to look back, she added, "I wouldna say muckle about it to Jeanie. She's taken't sair to heart."

And then the woman with her sharp voice, shrewd face, cynical manner, and kindly heart all strangely mingled, strode away to the work which had been interrupted to serve Robin Gray and his friends.

Wattie was looking frequently back to the cot and halting as if half intending to return.

"What are ye glowering at, laddie?" said his mother,

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looking back to him as he made a longer pause than usual at a curve of the road.

Wattie ran after his mother, and when he reached her side looked over his shoulder again in the direction of the cot.

"What for was Jeanie greeting, mither?" he asked.

"Because Jeanie Falcon's drooned."

She always answered him seriously, however trivial the question might be.

"Drooned? Whaur?"

"At the bottom o' the sea—he's dead—we'll never see him again."

Wattie was thoughtful for a long while, and then—

"Will he aye bide amang the fishes? What a drookit creature he'll be!" and he laughed, whilst his mother regarded him wistfully.

Jeanie's sorrow was very quiet. Save that her face was a little more haggard than it had been previously, and that she would pause occasionally in her work with a dim vacant stare on her face, there was no outward sign of her heart's woe.

But the world was dark and weary to her now, for she saw no hopeful future. Whilst Jeanie lived there had always been a bourne to look to, that inspired courage to meet the present difficulty. Now there was just the daily fight, without other promise of rest than that of the grave. The bitterest pang of such a loss springs from the utter exclusion of the loved one from our vision of the future.

Robin Gray did not present himself at the cottage for more than a week. He knew that Jeanie would suffer cruelly, and he did not care to see her until the worst of it was over. He made inquiries, meanwhile, and satisfied himself that the *Colin* and *Falcon* had been lost in the manner described to him by the Laird. But of the cause of the fire he was not satisfied.

The insurance agent had shown him the various statements of the men who had escaped. Carrach's statement contained the only suggestion of the cause of the fire; that one of the crew had been down in the hold and had permitted a spark to escape from his lantern without knowing it. The only

man he knew who had been in the hold that evening was James Falcon ; and probably Falcon's reason for lingering so long on the brig that he had been unable to escape, was owing to the fear of the consequences of his negligence or oversight.

The agent received the statements from the men themselves, with the exception of the mate's, which had been brought to him by the skipper in writing, as Hutcheson had taken a ship at Cork and sailed for China without coming home.

Robin determined to see Hutcheson privately if he ever came back to Portlappoch. But of this he said nothing.

Although he spoke to Adam and the guidwife about the *Colin*, and honestly lamented the sad fate of such a promising young fellow as James Falcon, no reference to either passed between Jeanie and him. He observed her sorrow, and respected it with the silence she seemed to desire.

Eager as he was to tell her of the hope which this calamity had permitted to spring again in his breast, he did not hastily intrude it upon her. He was waiting for time to soften her grief before he ventured to speak ; and with as much cunning as a man of his years and inexperience in wooer's craft, or indeed craft of any kind, could command, he concealed the lover under the character of the sympathizing friend.

Perhaps it should be said rather that he tried to conceal the real nature of his regard for her, and believed he succeeded. But anybody with eyes open could easily fathom the brawny farmer's motives. Kindly and open handed as he was with all who were in difficulties, his interest in Adam Lindsay and his family was clearly of more than ordinary depth.

The summer, however, had passed, and harvest was nearly through, and he had not spoken yet. The words had been more than once at the tip of his tongue, and he had hastily swallowed them again, as some pensive glance of Jeanie's eye reminded him that she was still thinking of Jeamie.

"She would sune get ower that if we were ance married," he would say to himself as he turned away ; "confound it, I wish the puir lad hadna been drooned, or I hadna cared sae muckle for her."

At last the opportunity he had so longed for presented itself to him—under somewhat gloomy auspices certainly.

The market-day before harvest finished at Cairnieford, Adam, who although still unable to use his arm, could manage to walk as far as the town with the help of a stout stick, returned from the Port to find Jeanie in a high state of alarm about her mother. Mrs. Lindsay had had an unusually “bad turn.”

The doctor came, and directed that the patient should be carefully nursed and served with nourishing and delicate food, mentioning a variety of dainties, which were as far beyond Jeanie’s power to procure as the fruit of Aladdin’s cave.

What was her surprise a couple of hours afterward to receive a basket from the town, brought by the doctor’s boy, containing almost everything that had been ordered for her mother. She knew who had been the sender, although the laddie said he had got the things from his master. She knew quite well that the doctor had met Robin Gray in the market, told him about her mother, and he had forwarded the necessary articles he knew she could not obtain otherwise.

He came himself in the afternoon, and on the threshold she arrested him with thanks.

“Ye’re placing us under new obligations every day,” she said in the quiet sad way she had obtained lately; “an’ I dinna think we’ll ever be able to pay ye back. Whiles I think that ye maun fancy ye get little even o’ thanks for a’ ye hae dune. But oh, dinna think that, for it’s because the heart is fu’ that words are scarce.”

Like most generous men, he felt awkward in acknowledging gratitude; so he moved his huge feet uneasily, and answered:—

“I ken a’ that, Jeanie—but how is she now?”

“Better, an’ she’s fallen into a sleep.”

“That’s weel, and—and—Jeanie—”

He suddenly gripped her arm—still a shapely one, although it had lost much of its plumpness.

There was a pause, and her sad eyes scanned his face with a fear in them of what was coming.

"There's something I hae wanted to say to ye for a lang while, Jeanie," he said hurriedly, and gazing fixedly at her hand; "but for the reason that I didna want to fash ye, I hae held back. Ye may as weel ken now as ony ither time."

"Aye, Mister Gray," she said huskily, turning her face from him.

"I want ye to marry me, Jeanie," he said simply, and with emotion; "that's the plain truth, and that's the way ye can relieve yoursel' o' a' the weight o' debt ye fancy ye're owing me and worrying yoursel' about. I'm an auld man maybe for siccan a young lass, but ye ken me, and ye winna find ony difference in me as lang's I live. I'll try to make ye happy, lass, and your faither and mither comfortable. That's a' I hae to say."

She took his big strong hand in hers, and pressed it warmly.

"Ye hae been a guid frien' to us at our sairest need," she answered chokingly; "an' if ye had asked me to lay doon my life for ye, I would hae dune't willingly. But, oh, I canna—canna be your wife, when I'm ay thinking about him that's awa."

"That wound'll heal, Jeanie, in time. Ye canna be his now, or I wouldna hae spoken. But ye can if ye will mak three folk happy. For their sakes, Jeanie, dinna refuse me."

He spoke with a simple earnestness that moved her deeply, knowing as she did the truth and goodness of his nature. There was nothing of a girl's bashfulness in her manner. His grave earnest speech had its effect upon her; and, besides, she had been prepared for something of this sort long ago.

"I ken that he's awa; but, oh, my thochts are wi' him yet, an' I couldna be a true wife ay thinking about him. But there's naething in the warld for me to do noo but help my faither an' puir mither."

"Ye'll do that best as mistress o' Cairnieford; and your memory o' James Falcon winna mak ye a haet the waur a wife."

"Gi'e me a wee while to think—until the morn—I canna, canna answer ye the noo."

"I dinna want to press ye ower sair or ower suné," he said, detaining her, and now his clear eyes rested on her averted face yearningly—eyes glistening with a passion in which his whole strength seemed concentrated. "Maybe I shouldna hae spoken yet; but, wow, lass, it's been hard wark to keep the upper hand o' the thoughts and feelings that hae been jum'lin' through me sae lang. I hae tried wi' a' my micht to keep doon the words that I hae been burnin' to speak, lest they should pain you, and mak' a gowk o' mysel'. But I canna bear't ony langer. Jeanie, Jeanie, lass, ye hae been like the licht o' heaven itsel' to me—Guid forgi'e me if 't be wrang to feel sae. I just couldna help mysel'. A' the gowd I hae won and saved, a' my beasts and plenishing that I hae been toiling for, for mair nor thretty year, hae grown as nocht in my e'e, compared wi' you. I would heave them a' frae me this minute, wi' a glad heart, if that would bring ye ony nearer to me."

"Oh dinna say ony mair," she cried, striving to escape from him. The passion of the man made her tremble; for she felt that she had nothing wherewith to requite it.

"I maun speak on noo, if it was to be the last time I was ever to speak again wi' you. I ken's its redic'lous like for an man like me (bitterly) to be speaking this way. But I canna help mysel'. A deevil or an angel has got possession o' me, and's drivin' me on whether I will or no. God help me, I feel mair like a wean ready to greet I dinna ken what for, nor a man that micht be your father. I ken hoo redic'lous it is; I ken hoo folk would lauch at me did they ken o't; but a' that just makes it the waur to bear. Dinna ye lauch at me, lass, for that would drive me mad at ance."

"Oh, Heaven kens hoo I wish that I could gie ye sic a heart as ye deserve," she exclaimed impetuously; and was sorry the next moment that she had said so much, feeling the tremulous eagerness with which he drew her shrinking form toward him, and fearing, with good reason, that he had accepted the wish as equivalent to the power to realize it.

"They were sweet words, hinny, sweet words to ane that

never ken'd faither, mither, or sister, and began life handin' horses in the market, and herdin' cattle—wha's had a sair faucht wi' the warld, though he has got the better o't, and never ken'd what it was to hae onybody to lo'e him for his ain sake. Ye needna draw frae me, Jeanie. Powerfu' though this passion be, it hasn'a the power to make me forget that I'm Robin Gray, twa score and ten, and ye're a young lassie whase kind heart pities me, and can do nae mair."

"I would do onything—onything in the warld but this, to pleasure ye." (Gasping and confused.)

"And this is the only thing in the world that can pleasure me (calming); and gin ye'll come to my hame, and bring the sunsheen into't, ye'll never hae cause to sorrow, if it be in the power o' man to mak' ye happy."

"I hae no doubt o' that" (sincerely).

"The morn, then, ye'll tell me whether or no ye'll be the guidwife o' Cairnieford."

"Aye, the morn."

"And ye's hae my guidwill to't," said Adam, who had come out seeking Jeanie in time to hear the last words.

"Thank ye, Adam, but it's the lassie's I want first."

"Ye's hae that, Cairnieford, ye's hae that."

"We'll ken the morn."

And Jeanie, having retreated the moment her father had appeared, Robin hurried off; unwilling to remain, lest he should in any way take advantage of the influence he was aware that Adam was ready to use on his behalf.

But although he was too generous to avail himself of that influence, he was mistaken in fancying that it would not be used unasked.

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## CHAPTER X.

## A HEART STRUGGLE.

" My father argued sair, my mither didna speak,  
But she looked in my face till my heart was like to break."  
—*The Ballad.*

ADAM LINDSAY was a stern man, and apt to grumble petulantly at the sharp stones and thorns he had to tramp over on his road of life. But he was not intentionally unkind in act or word. Simply, his conduct was regulated by a narrow view of morals.

To him the chief end of man was to attend the kirk regularly, to "pay his way," and to save as much siller as possible. That was the sum total of his creed; and he was sincerely consistent in walking by its light. If the light happened to make him uncharitable in judging his neighbours, he was unconscious of the failing. Well-doing was to him synonymous with making siller. Justice meant paying everybody whatever number of pounds, shillings, and pence might be owing. Yet when he heard the minister preach against the worship of Mammon, Adam had no suspicion that he was in any way guilty of that sin. Sentiment entered very slightly into his nature; and his affection for his daughter displayed itself in pride of her deft and thrifty ways. When James Falcon asked her to be his wife, Adam was proud that a daughter of his should marry one who was regarded by most folk as in a measure the adopted son and probable heir of the Laird of Clashgirn.

When he learned that Falcon was obliged to sail in the *Colin* and put off the marriage because he had no money, and was unable to obtain the farm from the Laird without it, he was disappointed. But he thought it would come right after a while.

The news came that Falcon was lost, and Adam said, "Puir lad, on his first voyage too! Aweel, we maun a' die ae time or ither."

Now, Robin Gray had asked Jeanie to marry him, and Adam,

proud as he had been at the idea of her becoming the wife of Falcon, whose fortune was at the best only in prospect, was still prouder to think that she should become at once mistress of such a bein house as that of Cairnieford. So, in the evening, when Mrs. Lindsay was lying quiet and much relieved by the administration of the mixture the doctor had supplied, and a glass of the wine Robin Gray had supplied, Adam spoke.

It had been working in him all the afternoon, and especially for the last hour, during which he had been seated by the fire on the straight-backed chair. The Bible lay on his knee and his hand rested on the open page, his finger pointing to the verse at which he had stopped reading.

Jeanie was sitting on a stool opposite, knitting a long blue "ribbed" stocking, her head bowed, and her fingers moving rapidly. In that position she had remained for the last half hour and no word passed between them. But indeed they never entered into what might be called conversation. Jeanie was still but a bairn in her father's eyes, and in her's he was the parent to be answered and obeyed when he chose to speak, but not addressed as she might have done an ordinary friend.

It never occurred to him that she was a woman, and might be able to converse with him about the general affairs of their small world as a neighbour would have done. Consequently they would sit for night after night without a word passing between them, except in the form of a question as to whether or not something had been done, or a direction to do something.

"Hae ye thocht o' what Cairnieford was saying, Jeanie?" said Adam, abruptly turning his eyes from the fire to her.

Jeanie started as if a pistol had exploded at her ear; one of her knitting needles slipped a dozen loops, and in hastily trying to repair the damage her worsted became ravelled. Her hands trembled slightly as she tried to unravel it, but it seemed almost as if she were making it worse rather than better. Something was choking her and she could not speak. She knew that the crisis had come which she could no longer put off.

Adam had never before waited so long for an answer from his daughter, and he repeated his question peremptorily.

"What's wrang wi' the lass?" he exclaimed impatiently, not having received an immediate response. "Did ye no hear what I was saying?"

"Aye, faither, I heard ye," she said agitatedly, the ravelment of the worsted becoming still more confusing.

"What way do ye no speak then, and no sit there like a dummy that couldna answer a sensible question?"

"I was gaun to speak, faither, if ye would but gie me time. I hae been thinking o't an'—an'—"

"Weel, what are ye hirplin' at noo?" and his finger slipped impatiently from the verse at which it had been pointed.

"I dinna think that I ought to agree—I dinna think that I can agree."

She became somewhat calmer as soon as she had pronounced this decision, which she knew quite well was in direct opposition to her parent's wishes. But she did not raise her eyes from her work, to which she applied herself with renewed energy.

Adam opened his eyes wide, fairly lost his place in the book altogether, and gave his maimed arm a jerk which resulted in a twinge of pain that brought forth a short groan, and did not increase his patience.

"Dinna think ye ought to—dinna think ye can agree!" he ejaculated, as soon as he could find breath for his indignation; "an' what for no, I would like to ken? Is he no a weel-doing man, an' a kind-hearted man wi' a bein house an' a' that ony sensible woman would desire—aye, an' let me tell ye that ony woman in the town would loup at his offer and be proud o't."

"He's a' that ye say and mair; but—oh, father, I canna marry him—or anybody."

"An' what for no, I say again, I would like to ken?"

He emphasized his demand by closing the Bible on his knee with a slap.

Mrs. Lindsay turned her head feebly on the pillow and looked beseechingly at her daughter.

"For the reason I hae gi'en himsel'," she said in a low sad voice that was broken by suppressed sobs; "because I'm no fit to be his wife wi' a' my heart lying out yonder wi' Jeamie i' the sea."

"Whatna havers is that ye're saying? Ye canna marry a drooned man, can ye? an' I ettle ye's no get siccans anither offer as Cairnieford's this towmond or mair."

"I dinna want ony offer, faither, an' it's no for his bein house that I would tak' Robin Gray or onyboby. I respec' him ower muckle for that, and if he was as puir as Jeamie was I would rather hae him nor ony ither man I ken; but I dinna want to marry."

She had unravelled the worsted, and recommenced knitting now with a dark shadow on her bonnie face, and tears glistening in her eyes.

Adam sat bolt upright in his chair, glowering at her. It was the first time his daughter had been openly disobedient, and the effect was a shock as great as if she had perpetrated a crime of the deepest dye.

"Ye would drive a saunt oot o's wits wi' anger. A braw thing for a man come to my years, that's wrought hard a' my days to gie ye a decent upbringin', to find that my ain dochter winna do my biddin', when she kens it's a' for her ain guid."

"I never refused to do your biddin' afore, faither, and I wouldn't do't noo, but I canna help mysel'. Ye dinna ken what a sair fecht I hae had to bring mysel' to say no, when in mony ways it would be sae muckle to my advantage to say aye."

"Ye had nae business to hae siccans a fecht. What in Guid's name should ye fecht about? Was ye quarrelin' wi' yourself because ye was offered a guid hame an' a kind-hearted man?"

"No——" she was going to say that it was because she had no love to give him; but she felt that such an answer would only have irritated her father the more.

"Then what was't? Was't because ye jist wanted to anger me? Let me tell ye there never was ane that quarrelled wi'

het parritch that didna wish for cauld afore's death. Ye's be nae dochter o' mine gin ye dinna tell Cairnieford the morn that ye'll tak' him an' thankfu'."

Jeanie felt her cheek burning, and she was disposed to give a still more decisive answer than she had yet done; when raising her eyes she saw the white imploring face of her mother, and her heart faltered.

"It's the maist extr'ordinar' nonsense I ever heard tell o'," Adam went on angrily, "to think that ye'll set your face against me and your mither an' a man like Cairnieford, an' a' for nae ither reason nor that the man ye wanted's drooned. Gin he'd been livin' ye couldna mak' mair ado. I lay my command upo' ye to answer Cairnieford as he deserves to be, an' if ye winna, ye'll be the sufferer yoursel'. As for me and your mither, we're no lang for this world noo, but I didna expec' that our last days were to be made miserable by the disobedience o' our ae bairn. I thocht we were ill eneuch without that."

To do Adam justice, all his eagerness for this marriage was not in any way influenced by the idea that it would benefit himself; it was wholly on his daughter's account that he desired it—that he might have the pride of seeing her well settled before his time came for flitting to the kirkyard. Whilst he had been speaking last some glimmering of what the future might be to Jeanie if she refused this offer of a comfortable home dawned upon him, and, adding to the real pain he experienced from her disobedience, overcame his wrath sufficiently to make his voice husky as he finished. Jeanie had no answer to make, and he did not speak. He read a chapter from the Bible, and went to bed in an ill-humour.

When Robin Gray came next day with a wistful uneasiness expressed on his genial face, he found Adam at the door.

"The auld wife's a wheen better," he said, moving uncomfortably on his chair. "Jeanie's in the kitchen. Gang but."

He had not said a word to her about the conversation of the previous night. He was too stern and proud for that; but he was not quite satisfied that the issue would be as he

desired. So whilst the warm sunlight was glaring around him there was a dark sorrow on the old man's brow.

Jeanie was in the kitchen washing the dishes when Robin entered. She was paler, he thought, than he had ever seen her before. Her voice seemed lower and sadder as she bade him "guid mornin', sir."

Robin's heart swelled, for that did not sound like a very promising address to an anxious lover, and Robin at two score and ten was as anxious a wooer as ever was youth of twenty. He had not known what it was to lie awake even half an hour after going to bed for many years until last night; when he had lain uncomfortably awake till early morning. It was no marvel, then, that he observed the slightest alteration of look or tone.

He made no comment, however, and after simply expressing his pleasure in learning that the guidwife was better like, he stood hesitatingly twining and untwining the lash of his heavy riding whip round his fingers. She went on wiping the dishes, and both were conscious of an awkward pause.

"I ken ye're waiting for me to tell ye what I hae determined on," she said presently, and with some nervousness.

"There's nae use concealing't, Jeanie, I hae puir patience when I'm set on onything, till I ken the best or worse o't; and the hope and the fear o' your answer hae been keeping up sic a wranglin' in my head that they hae driven a' thought o' ither things oot o't."

"I'll no keep ye waiting lang noo; but I'm just like ane that's feart for the sea, an' wha's got ae foot in a boat an' the ither oot, and is no sure whether to gang forrit or back."

"Then ye haena decided yet." (A little dissatisfied.)

"Aye, I hae made up my mind—to tell ye a' the truth an' let ye decide for yoursel'."

"The truth—what about?" (A little surprised.)

"About mysel'." (Wiping a plate slowly.) "Ye ken a' about Jeamie, and ye hae said that it winna matter. That's anither reason for the honour and respec' I bear ye, and I couldna do it itherways, seeing a' that ye hae dune for me

and mine. But I canna care for ye as I cared for him, and gin I was my lane in the world I would say *no* to your offer, jist because I honour ye, and think ye should hae a wife deservin' o' ye—”

“ But what better would I be if I didna care for her? ” he interrupted eagerly.

“ I canna answer that,” she said, smiling in spite of her sorrow; and that Robin accepted as a good omen. “ But I was gaun to say that I’m no my lane, and for the sake o’ them that need my help, for the sake o’ a’ that we are awing ye—gin ye can take me understandin’ a’ that, I’m ready to be your wife, Robin Gray, and I’ll try to be a faithfu’ ane.”

“ It’s a bargain,” he cried, loud with joy, and catching her in his arms, in spite of the plate, which was smashed on the floor, he kissed her with a smack which certainly sounded of delight. “ It’s a bargain—and that’s the erls,” he added.

There never was lover so enthusiastic, and there never was lady so cold. She seemed to become aware that she was playing an ungracious part, for she tried to smile and said softly—

“ Ye winna heed me being a wee thing quiet, for it’s mair i’ my heart to greet nor to laugh.”

“ I’ll no heed onything ye like to do, my dawtie, sae lang’s yo dinna change your mind afore the minister puts it ayont your power to do’t. Bless ye, lassie, ye hae gien me a happiness that I never ken’d afore. I’ll craw as crouse as a gamcock noo, an’ I’m half minded to gie ye twa or three steps o’ the Hielan’ fling this minute, jist to relieve mysel’ o’ some o’ this joy that’s swellin’ my breast.”

“ I wish ye may never hae cause to repent o’ your joy.”

“ Repont! Hoots, lassie, haud up your head an’ look in my face. See if it’s aye that’s ever like to change. Nae fear o’that; its new life ye hae gien me, an I’m as young again’s I was three minutes sync. Nae doubt we’ll hae bits o’ bickerings, as a’ folk hae; but we’ll haed them wi’ a kiss, an’ gang douceely to kirk an’ fair thegither for a’ that.”

Jeanie could not help experiencing a sense of relief. As

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the sunshine lightens the heart so the warm light of this man's great love shone in upon her despondency, lifted it up, and blessed her with the first breath of sweet content she had known for many days.

There is an irresistible gladness rewards the bestower of pleasure on others—like mercy, the gift blesses the giver and receiver; and Jeanie was in no way unfaithful to the memory of James Falcon in feeling the happier for Robin Gray's joy. Besides, it is only the sourest of natures which can persist in remaining gloomy and sad when the radiance of a pleasant future is shed upon them. She had been fretted by the thousand petty cares of a struggle for mere existence, with a dark hopeless future. That was all over now; there were light and peace before her; and as the weight of her burden decreased, she could not but be relieved.

"I'll ay be glad when I see ye happy, Robin," she said as he was leaving, after having insisted upon an early marriage, and obtained her consent.

"Then ye'll ay be glad, Jeanie lass, for I'll ay be happy."

He spoke quite confidently—no shadow of fear crossing his mind.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### A WEDDING AND A HOME-COMING.

"Fy let us a' to the bridal,  
For there'll be lilting there;  
For Jock's to be married to Maggie,  
The lass wi' the gowden hair."—*Old Song*.

THERE was no happier man in all Scotland than Robin Gray on that bright Sabbath morning when the banns of marriage were proclaimed between the bachelor of Cairnieford and the spinster of Portlappoch. He had oiled his hair and brushed his whiskers with unusual care, and dressed himself with all the labour of a youthful beau to attend the kirk that morning.

He sat proudly erect on his seat in the far corner of the

kirk when the proclamation was made, and he never blinked under the curious stare of the congregation, which was immediately turned upon him, as if he were about to perpetrate some deed which demanded the active interest of all who knew anything about him. Even those who only knew him by name took a good look at him, as if he had suddenly done something which rendered him worthy of special observation.

Douce old couples, who had known the ups and downs of married life, regarded him with grave benignancy; young couples who had just passed the Rubicon, smiled to each other, as if it were a satisfaction to discover others embarking on the same sea as themselves. Maidens looked and wondered when their turn would come; not a few would have been well pleased to change places with the spinster who had just been proclaimed, and, having no chance of doing so, thought that she had "waled a man wi' years eneuch onyway." Those who knew about James Falcon gave their watering mouths a wry twist, and thought that she had "on wi' the new love gey sune after being aff wi' the auld."

Youths who knew Jeanie, on the other hand, would not have been sorry to change places with the proud bachelor, and wondered that she would take such an old man. Then they thought sneeringly of well-stocked Cairnieford, and for five seconds held woman-kind in general in bitter scorn for their mercenary affections.

The stare presently turned from the bachelor to Adam Lindsay's seat. But Adam was there alone, dry, clean, and stiff, the splints and bandages of his wounded arm hidden by a big red cotton handkerchief, the corners of which were fastened behind his neck, and the body of it forming a comfortable rest for the arm. There was satisfaction and pride in the father's heart at that moment, such as he had never known since the day on which his own banns had been proclaimed. There was his daughter publicly announced as the future guidwife of Cairnieford. He felt as much honoured as if he had publicly received some acknowledgment of personal merit.

As for Robin, he was proud too, as well as happy. He gazed straight at the pulpit during the examination of the folk; but his eyes wavered a moment to rest on the hawkish face of the Laird of Clashgirn, whose seat was just beneath the pulpit—that he might be the nearer to godliness probably. The Laird's eyes twinkled, and there was a queer grin on his visage as his head made one of his peculiar dabs forward at his Bible. It was a complacent and patronizing grin, and yet Robin read it as meaning, “I hae got ye noo, my frien’.”

The sunlight streamed in through the windows with their white blinds at either side of the pulpit, and shed a glancing radiance around the ruddy-visaged and snowy-haired minister as he gave out the psalm. The congregation rose and the simple song of praise was chanted, not in the best of tune, perhaps, for the precentor's voice was cracked and his tone shrill, and few of the folk practised music or attempted to sing a note except in the kirk, but with a sincerity in singing right or wrong that imparted a certain harmony to the discord.

With all its discord of untrained voices, the song had never before sounded so solemnly in the ears of Robin Gray, for his heart was glad and lifted up in thankfulness.

When the service was over, and the congregation was slowly, and in order, quitting the kirk, groups of twos and threes halted among the graves outside, and about the gate of the kirkyard, to exchange friendly greetings, and gossip a little about the weather, the crops, the sermon, and the general news of the week—for newspapers were rare in those days, and the news of a month past progressed slowly to the folk of Portlappoch, and was passed graciously from mouth to mouth as *news*.

The forthcoming marriage was another topic of this day's gossip, and as Robin halted to speak to his acquaintances, he received congratulations and pawky smiles, which he accepted with good-humoured thanks.

The Laird of Clashgirn, leaning on his thick gold-headed Sabbath staff—for he used a plainer one on week-days—hirpled up to him.

"I gie ye joy, Cairniesford," he said with a complacent dab, "and a lang life wi' your dawtie. Od, it's extraordinar'. Ye beat us a' wi' your farm an' your cattle, and noo ye beat us a' wi' marryin' the bravest lass amang us."

"I'm oblieged to ye, McWhapple," answered Robin drily and moving off.

The Laird hirpled after him with malicious friendliness.

"Aye, she's a braw quean" (smirking and taking a pinch); "but it couldna be true that she cared muckle for my puir frien' Jeames Falcon, or she couldna hae forgot him so soon."

Robin halted, and his visage darkened for an instant. Somehow, this reference to Falcon seemed to convey a slur upon Jeanie and himself, and a twinge of anger shot through him that imparted a bitterness to the cup of joy he had been quaffing. But the shadow passed; the sun shone too brightly on this day to permit it to linger.

"That's awteen hersel' and him that's awa, McWhapple," he answered quietly; "but she kens that if she was to greet her e'en oot, or to bide single a' her days, she couldna bring the dead to life."

"And so she mends her loss wi' taking anither man. Od, that's woman-like."

"Just that. By-the-by, did ye hear what Dunbar was telling me? There's been a heap o' smugglin' hereabout, especially in brandy an' tobacco."

"That smugglin's an awfu' ruination to honest traders."

"Nae doot. Ye do a wee in the brandy and tobacco trade yoursel', d'ye no?"

"Whiles—whiles" (grasping his staff tightly).

"Aye, weel, ye'll be glad to hear that the gaugers hae gotten word o' the smugglin' and they're determined to put it down."

"A guid thing—a guid thing for honest trade. Guid day to ye, Cairniesford."

And the Laird hirpled away to the inn for his pony.

Robin's good-humour was completely restored now; for he was always amused whenever he had said anything to make

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triumph and satisfaction by giving his wife a hearty kiss in the presence of the delighted company. All present congratulated the pair, and Jeanie looked somewhat dazed as one after another saluted her as Mistress Gray.

A gig, hired from the inn for the occasion, was waiting outside. The bride's box—a small thing containing all her "providing," which had been necessarily of a very limited nature—was placed under the seat. She took leave of her father and mother.

"I wish ye weel, Mistress Gray," said Adam, stiff and proud; "and may ye live lang enuch to unnerstan' what a proud day this is for me."

"The Lord keep ye, my bairn," said the meek mother tearfully, "and make this the beginnin' o' mony days o' joy."

"I'll warrant that, mither," cried Robin heartily.

He helped his wife into the gig, and a shower of old bauchels were thrown at them as he drove away, looking back, flourishing his whip, and returning the shout of good speed with cheery voice. He made the horse gallop furiously, to keep pace with the joyful dancing of his heart.

"There's nae use tryin' to tell ye what I feel, guidwife," he cried, suddenly throwing his arm around her, while whip and reins were shifted to one hand; "I canna do't. But it's jist—it's jist heeven. My certes, I'd hae been married lang syne if I'd kent there'd been sae muckle delicht in't."

And crack went the whip again, and away went the horse with a fresh bound and renewed vigour, whilst the setting sun was glinting upon them through the trees, and the birds were loudly singing their evening song. The keen wind, the sunlight, the chorus of birds, the rich green foliage of the trees, and the yellow ripening stooks in the fields—all seemed to sympathize with the bridegroom's gladness. Even Jeanie felt exhilarated by the rapid motion of the vehicle and the blithesomeness of all that surrounded her.

If the marriage at the cottage had been quiet, Robin had determined that the "hame-coming" should make up for it in loud mirth.

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So, as they drove up the glen in which the white house of Cairnieford nestled cosily amongst firs and beeches, with the last red rays of the setting sun glancing over the roof, there was a crowd gathered at the corner of the by-road leading from the main road to the steading.

Farmers and their wives, with grown-up sons and daughters, and all the servants of Cairnieford, buxom dairy-maids and sturdy ploughmen, were waiting to welcome the happy couple. The moment the gig turned the head of the road, near the mouth of the glen, and became visible to the waiting crowd, a welcoming shout echoed along the hills. It was repeated when the gig stopped in their midst, and hearty congratulations were accompanied by warm grasps of the hand, which indicated the sincerity of the speakers.

John Dunbar, the farmer of Boghaugh, being the oldest man of the company, gave the bride a paternal kiss, bidding her welcome hame, and adding that "ye nicht hae cast your gartens a hantle waur, guidwife."

Robin in his boisterous happiness repeated the salutation as they entered the house, after the bachelors present, young and old, had competed in a race from the corner of the road to the house for the bride's gartens. The trophy was won by a strapping young ploughman, whose length of limb obtained for him the cognomen of Lang Rob, and whose victory obtained for him the jibes and cheers of his fellow-competitors, and the blushing smiles of the lasses; for Lang Rob had proved in the contest that he was to be the first amongst them to wed, and his willingness to submit to his fate. Consequently the lads laughed and joked, and the lasses simpered and blushed, wondering which of them might be his future partner.

The barn had been cleared, and a long table, easily constructed by placing a kitchen table at each end and a number of planks supported by tressels between them, had been placed down the centre of the floor. The board was covered with snowy-white cloths, and actually bent under its piles of good homely fare.

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Singed sheep's heads and haggis were the principal dishes, although there was beef and mutton in plenty too. Herrings and whittings, brought that morning fresh from the Port by Girzie Todd, with a huge platter of haddock, filled up the corners; and what room remained was occupied by kebsocks of cheese and piles of bannocks and scones of barley-meal. These, with a barrel of good strong ale, a keg of whisky, and sundry bottles of brandy, composed such a feast as made the mouths of the company water for days afterward at the memory of it.

They ate and drank until they could eat and drink no more. Then the table was cleared, and with unceremonious haste everything was carried outside, except a few long forms for the elders to sit on, and one of the tables, which was thrust into a corner to serve as a platform for the musicians.

The musicians consisted of Roving Roney, the piper, and Souter Tam, who played the fiddle, and who, consequently, never touched an awl if he could obtain a drappie by fiddling at any of the social gatherings of the country side.

The orchestra, in a strain of wild discordance, struck up a reel, and away went the dancers, "hooching," laughing, clattering their feet, and flinging their legs about in an alarming fashion, whilst the yells they uttered at every turn of the reel or the strathspey completely drowned the discord of the music.

The rafters shook again with the sounds of mirth; the candles, stuck on bits of wood against the wall, jumped and spluttered. The old folks, whose dancing days were by, kept time to the clatter of youthful feet by beating their own and their heavy staves on the floor, cracking their thumbs gaily, and joining with their feeble voices in the wild chorus of "hoochs"—a species of happy yell which can only be appreciated when heard, and compared with which the war-whoop of the Indian must be weak.

When the fun was at its loudest, and when the lights had diminished by several candles burning out and others dropping from their niches, leaving shadowy corners where favoured

lads might steal a kiss without the old folk being the wiser, the bride contrived to slip unobserved out of the barn and into the house.

The bridegroom, who had proved his youth in spite of his gray hairs by dancing and daffing more furiously than any, soon observed the absence of the one who was to him the queen of all, and immediately endeavoured to follow. But Lang Rob saw him slyly attempting to escape, and raised the halloo.

Robin thereupon threw off all attempt at disguise, and made a bold dash for the door, rushing out with the whole troupe, shouting and laughing, at his heels. But whether Robin's limbs had really grown suppler than usual, or Lang Rob's grown stiffer with the exercise they had undergone, not even he could overtake the flying bridegroom.

The latter darted into the house, slammed to the door, and barred it in the face of his pursuers, leaving them to spend the rest of the night, and separate as their pleasure might direct.

So the happy day came to an end.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### A CALM BEFORE THE STORM.

“ Shall tempest-riven blossom  
When fair leaves fall away,  
In coldness close its bosom  
'Gainst beams of milder day.”—*Wm. Thom.*

WHATEVER sad thoughts Jeanie might have been afflicted with on her wedding-day, they had been almost completely ousted by the bustle and excitement attendant on the event. Only once she had been troubled—when standing before the minister listening dreamily to the words which were to change the whole current of her life, and wondering what a simple

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matter this marriage ceremony proved to be. She had looked forward to it with so much awe; she had thought of it with so much vague dread, as of a rite in which there was some mystic element that would visibly transform her nature; and here it was passing with the same monotonous calm of the ordinary Sabbath service in the kirk, but without the solemnity the latter obtained from time and place. It had not even the importance which she attached to the minister's gown and broad white bands. He was just dressed in his usual black clothes; and although his tone was earnest, and his expression grave, she could not divest herself of a feeling that the ceremony was not half so solemn as such an important event demanded. There was Bessie Tait, with a sly smirk on her comely face, alternately glancing at the bride, the bridegroom, and Jock Dunbar, to see how they were taking the proceedings. There was Jock with a long face and open mouth, staring hard at the minister as if he expected him to say something terrible; and there was Robin in his new blue coat with the high collar and the bright brass buttons, his features screwed into an expression of attention, whilst he eagerly watched for the words which would declare the man and woman one. These were trivial thoughts for such a moment: she became suddenly conscious of that, and with the consciousness had come the memory of him by whose side she had expected to stand whenever she had dreamed of her bridal day. Then her heart sunk, leaving her sick and faint.

But Robin Gray's warm grasp had recalled her to the present duty, and the troubrous memory had been driven away: It had not been permitted to return with any force during that day. On the following morning when she arose in her new home, the sun was shining, and Robin had so many things to show her, so many new arrangements to plan and to discuss with her—his great love appearing in all, bright as the sunlight—that under such influence it was impossible for her to be sad even had she tried. She had no intention of doing that. She was wholly untainted by the spirit of discontent which cries all the more for what it cannot



have, because it is unreachable. She would rather be happy than otherwise if she could manage it.

She had loved James Falcon truly, loved him with all the strength of her pure simple nature; and had he lived she would have been the wife of no other man. But he was dead; and she had found a good kind husband, who had lifted her and those dear to her above the stings of poverty, the bitterness of which she knew too well, and she could not be otherwise than grateful. She had no highly refined sense of self-sacrifice; but she had a natural sense of duty, and a heart capable of a gratitude that led her as clearly in the right course as if she had received the most delicate education in ethics. Both gratitude and respect she brought to her husband full-handed; and out of these, no doubt, a tenderer sentiment would blossom in time. And indeed after the first few days of coyness, she could not help becoming a little proud of her home. She who had been accustomed to such pinching and striving was now mistress of plenty; and she was pleased, although her habits of thrift were not in the least danger of changing to those of waste.

So it was natural that by-and-by she should become somewhat proud of the guidman who had given her this home. Everybody liked him, everybody admired him—except perhaps the Laird—and the human heart is wonderfully influenced in its likings and dislikings by the opinions of others; however loudly we may assert our independence of judgment. Besides, his fidelity to her was constant and untiring. He observed her with kindling eyes as she moved about with matronly gravity, attending to the affairs of the house, or helping the lassies in the byre to milk a stubborn cow, or feeding the hens, or, in brief, performing any of the duties of a farmer's wife. He followed her steps with a devotion that seemed to grow day by day into a species of idolatry, that almost frightened her at times with the mere sense of her own unworthiness of it. She could not help being pleased by it for all that, any more than she could help being grateful to him; and day by day, as his passion increased, she learned to

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rest more upon his strength, and to resign herself to him with an utter faithfulness that was closely akin to love, if it were not love itself.

In this way James Falcon became a sad memory which troubled her only at intervals, and that faintly and more faintly, as the fading moon stirs in the depths of a loch. His name had never passed her lips since the marriage day. She avoided so far as might be every thought of him, because she felt that it was right to do so, and because she had an instinctive knowledge that the subject was one her husband disliked. He had given no hint to that effect: he seemed to have thrust the matter aside with a strong will that it might never interfere with his happiness. But one day he was mimicking the Laird, who had been making another of his shamly sympathetic speeches about a "puir frien'," and these words seemed to recall something unpleasant. Robin stopped, and in an awkward way began to speak of other affairs. Jeanie suspected that his abrupt halt had been caused by a reminiscence of Falcon, and she noticed that Robin did not mention the Laird for a good while afterward. That was the nearest approach they made in speech to the subject. If they had bound themselves by solemn vows to avoid it, they could not have done so more strictly. Not that they were afraid of it; but he for her sake, and she for his, held it better that the past should lie buried with the dead man out yonder in the sea, than that the faintest hint of it, however pure, should disturb the happiness of the present. Each, with no more selfish thought than to spare the other pain, wished to forget that Falcon had lived.

Her whole life became concentrated on one object—to make her guidman happy. She was faithful to her promise; and he was faithful to his, for he was "ay happy when he saw her pleased."

Alwyna seeking means to gratify his wife, Robin had insisted on removing her father and mother to Cairnieford. He had experienced a little difficulty in persuading Adam to consent to this arrangement.

"For thretty years," said the old fisherman in his stiff proud way, "I hae ay had a roof o' my ain, puir though it might be; an' I canna just stamack the idea o' bidin' aneath the roof o' anither, though it is yours an' my dochter's."

"Aweel, Adam," rejoined Cairnieford disappointed, but with a twinkle in his eyes as if he felt sure of overcoming the objection; "if ye winna flit ye'll hae to fee a lassie to do the work o' the house, an' look after my guid-mither. I'm thinking ye're a wee thing ower stiff in the joints to be reddin' up the place yersel', forbye lookin' after your fishing gear, and takin' your turn in the boat, as I hope ye'll sune be able to do."

"We can get Bess Tait's lassie to look in whiles an' see if the auld wife needs onything when I'm awa."

"Then ye would rather be behauden to Bess Tait than to Jeanie an' me?"

"I didna mean that."

"I'll no believe but ye do mean it unless ye come up by the morn without mair ado. It'll pleasure me, and it'll pleasure my guid-wife, wha'll be able then, without ony fash, to look after her mither as she's been used to do. There's naebody sae willin' to do it, and there's naebody sae able, as Jeanie. A' thing considered, it would be a mortal sin o' ye to keep the auld wife here."

The argument thus assumed too grave an aspect to be resisted even by Adam Lindsay's stubbornness. He yielded. So the oars, the boat, and the nets, were removed a couple of miles further along the shore, and were carried up the stream which coursed through the Glen of Cairnieford. Then the cottage was closed, and the key delivered to the Laird's agent.

That was another link between Jeanie and her husband, Gossips, and the Laird with his hypocritical benignance might pity him, and forebode sorrow as the upshot of such a hasty and unequal match as they were pleased to consider his had been; but all the croaking of all the birds of evil omen in the world would have fallen unheeded on Robin Gray's ears. He did not give a thought to the idle presages which had been whispered about after the Sabbath on which they had been

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“kirkit”—that is, when for the first time as man and wife they had taken their seats in the church. They had undergone a severe scrutiny. The colour and trimming of Jeanie’s big bonnet, the fold of her Paisley shawl—Robin’s gift of course—and its probable cost; her expression and his were all duly registered by the observant matrons and maidens, and formed a staple of interesting converse for the following week. Jeanie had sustained the scrutiny with quiet diffidence; and Robin had looked round with an air of proud satisfaction. After the week of marvel had passed, without any great calamity befalling the house of Cairnieford, the subject begun to lose its interest save to the few confirmed “clashmongers,” who, with persistent inquisitiveness, seized every opportunity of learning anything about the doings at the farm.

There was nothing particular, however, to learn, except that Jeanie made a capital farmer’s wife, although she had been brought up in a fisherman’s cot. She had taken the dairy entirely in her own hands; and she was reported to have a knack of getting more butter off the kirn than anybody else could do. Her hens laid more eggs and brought forth more chickens than others; the farm-workers sounded her praise all over the country for her sweet sowens, big scones, crumpy bannocks, and rich kale. All together, staid folk began to think that Cairnieford had made a lucky choice, and had got a “kindly managing body for his guidwife.”

The golden autumn slowly faded under the silver snows of winter. The hills and the glen assumed a glistening white mantle; and the crystal burn ran down from the high lands through the heart of the glen, touching the farmstead, and singing in the still air with a sharp merry voice. But whilst the snow fell, and the winds blew shrill and snell up from the sea, there was sweet content under the roof of Cairnieford and the future cast no shadow on the house.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

FROM THE SEA.

" Each whirl of the wheel,  
Each step brings me nearer  
The name of my youth—  
Every object grows dearer."—*H. Ainslie.*

GIRZIE TODD's butt-an'-a-ben formed the corner dwelling of a row of low-thatched houses at the Port end of the town. The walls were barely ten feet high, built of unhewn stone, white-washed; the thatch was black with age and smoke, and crowded with sparrows' nests. The windows were more like small square holes than anything else, and what glass remained in the frame-work was blue and knotted. Behind the house she had a patch of ground in which she reared kale, and sybows. Leaning against the wall was a little black shed which had once been used as a pig-stye, but which was now appropriated to the shelter of Dawnie, the cuddy.

There was a strong odour of fish about the place, which was readily accounted for by observing that at the side of every door of the row hung a fish-haik—a triangular wooden frame, barred like a diminutive gate, and studded with wooden pins, on which hung rows of herring to dry.

Girzie had just returned from her day's journey. It was only about five o'clock, although quite dark; for it was December, and there was a heavy wind lashing the tide against the Port, and moaning wildly over the bar.

She was in the shed "sorting up" her faithful servant for the night, and supplying him with his supper before she touched anything herself.

Wattie was in the house, down on his knees on the earthen floor at the fire-place. His teeth were chattering; and as he swelled his cheeks and used the whole strength of his lungs to blow the peats into a warm blaze, the fitful gleams of light showed that his nose was blue, his cheeks red, and his hands swollen to a raw-flesh appearance by the bitter cold.

He had no other light except what he could obtain from the

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fire, as his mother had taken the only lamp they possessed with her to the shed. The floor was worn into little hollows in many places, and especially about the doorway. As Wattie succeeded in fanning the peats into a glow, he heard somebody stumbling over one of these hollows.

He turned, expecting to see his mother, but instead he beheld a man, whom he failed to recognize. With open mouth and eyes, and without stirring from his hands and knees, he stared up at the intruder.

A man much about Wattie's own height, but browner and more muscular. He was dressed like a sailor, in a loose coarse jacket that added in appearance to his breadth, breeches of dark blue cloth, and a seaman's hat the broad brim of which shaded his features. He held a heavy black stick in one hand, resting on it slightly. Standing there quite still, with the feeble light on the hearth only serving to cast deeper shadows around him, he certainly did obtain something of an uncanny aspect.

Wattie's teeth began to chatter again, but with terror this time, and his eyes were fixed upon the man with that species of fascination which fright always inspires. He could not move them even to look for the approach of his mother.

The stranger advanced a step into the light of the fire, and Wattie's pulse stopped.

"Weel, Wattie, what are ye glowering at, man? Do ye no ken me? Whar's your mother?"

Wattie recognized him now, and as the man made another step forward, the natural with a shriek of terror sprang to his feet, and bounded out at the door. He rushed round to the shed, tumbled over an old trough in his haste, started up again, and dashed into the shed with such blind speed that he banged his mother up against the cuddy. There was scarcely room for her to fall, or she would certainly have been down.

She regained her balance, and before she recovered her breath she administered a smart cuff to the side of his head, as if to repair the injury done to herself, and to recall him to his senses.

"Ye daft idiwut, hae ye gaen clean crack a'thegither?" she cried angrily; "or what's wrang that ye come dinging folk ower that gate?"

"It's—it's him," blubbered Wattie, rubbing his eyes with his cuffs.

"Wha's him?"

"Him—cam' up frae 'mang the fishes—an' ye said we'd never see him ony mair—an' it's jist a ghaist."

Girzie stared in some bewilderment at her son. She understood now that something unusual had happened; but she did not waste time in trying to obtain an explanation from him. She took the classical-shaped cruise in her hand and strode round to the house, Wattie following and holding by her skirt; for much as he feared to face the ghost again, he feared still more to be left behind in the dark. Besides, he felt safe so long as his mother was with him.

"If ye'd jist gie him siccán a dunt as ye gied me enoo," he sobbed in a whisper, "he'd gey suné flee awa'!"

Girzie had been shading the light from the wind with her hand. She now raised it above her head as she halted on the threshold of her cot, and gazed fixedly at the man, who was standing quietly on the hearth peering down at the glowing fire. He had not heard her approach, and did not observe her presence until she spoke.

"Weel, maister—?"

She got no further. He had turned his head, and the light shook violently in her hand as if in danger of dropping to the floor.

"How are ye, Girzie?" he said, moving toward her. She advanced into the chamber, but keeping by the wall as if to avoid him, whilst Wattie clung to her skirt, hiding himself behind it.

"Heaven keep's and save's a'," she gasped; "but is't your ainsel, Jeames Falcon?"

"Aye, jist my ainsel; wha else would it be?" he answered with the old good-natured smile.

"Then ye're no drooned?"

"I think no, though I was near enough to't."

"Hech, sirs!" she ejaculated with relieved breathing, and setting the cruise down on the broad window sill; "but ye haen gien me a sair fricht, and Wattie too, puir callan."

Wattie by this time was peeping over his mother's shoulder, and hearing Falcon laugh—a degree of humanity which he could not reconcile with a creature who lived under water—he asked timidly—

"An' ye haena been bidin' wi' the fishes a' this while?"

"No, Wattie, I hae just been bidin' with other folk like oursel's."

"Aye, aye, man, an' what gar'd them tell the lee about ye, haudin' Jeanie greetin' an' sabbin' against the wa'?" continued Wattie, regaining courage, and shyly creeping nearer to Falcon with wondering eyes.

"Because they thought it true, no doubt, and maybe wished it so," answered Falcon, his face brightening at the mention of Jeanie's name; "and that minds me o' what I came here to speir, Girzie—"

"Na, lad," interrupted Girzie hastily; "ye's speir nae questions till ye hae had a bite o' something to drive the cauld out—it's ill speaking on a toom wame. Rin awa' and bring in the herrin', Wattie. Sit ye doon there, Jeames Falcon, and tell us a' about hoo ye ever won hame again."

With all her shrewd sharp ways Girzie was kindly at heart; and after the first shock of surprise she had divined at once that Falcon had come to ask about Jeanie. She had observed how his visage—browner and manlier than it had been a year ago—had brightened at the sound of her name, and she was a little puzzled to know how she was to acquaint him with the altered condition of affairs.

Falcon, although palpably impatient of all delay, knew the stubborn character of the old fishwife too well to attempt to obtain any information from her until she was ready to communicate it. So, with the best grace he could command, he seated himself on the stool to which she had pointed, whilst she busied herself cooking the herring on the peats and lay-

ing the table. The latter was a simple operation, and consisted merely of drawing the small deal table from its corner and placing three plates and half a dozen bannocks on it.

The conversation did not halt, however, whilst she thus busied herself; for however unwilling she might be to give news before he had partaken of her hospitality, she was not in the least averse to receive his. She was thinking about Cairnieford all the time he was speaking, and of those who were resting there in peaceful ignorance of the thunderbolt which was about to drop in their midst.

"I cam' round by Adam Lindsay's," he said, as he seated himself; "but the house is shut up."

"Aye—whan did you come back?" (drily and busily).

"I landed at Ayr the day, and walked over. I haena been in Portlappoch an hour yet."

"Then ye haena heard oucht o' your frien's?"

"No a word, an' that's what brought me here."

"Just that—but ye haena said a word aboot hoo ye came to be in life ava. Carrach and the lave o' them cam' hame—barrin' Hutcheson—and they a' said ye was drooned."

"Aye, tell us hoo ye wasna drooned," said Wattie, "courting" down before him, and drawing his knees up to his chin by clasping his hands round his ankles.

"Then they all got safe home?"

"Oo aye, safe an' weel eneuch."

"I'm glad of it, although it's more than some of them deserved," said Falcon quietly; "it was by no good-will of theirs that I managed to escape."

"Hoo was that, say ye?"

"The lads had taken an ill-will to me, but I know now that they were designedly set against me. However, they took it in their heads that it was me set fire to the brig, and they were for leaving me on deck while they got off in the sma' boat if it hadna been for Hutcheson. Carrach asked me to get a compass and the log out of his cabin. He said that there was no chance for them without the compass. That was a lie, for we were within two miles of land, and he knew it."

"Aye, he's a queer cratur," observed Girzie under her breath, and with a tone of bitterness.

"I got the compass, but found that I could not return to the larboard side of the brig where the boat lay, for the flames had cut off all passage that way. I dropped over the starboard side, intending to swim round to the sma' boat. I had scarcely touched the water, when there was an explosion o' a barrel o' powder that had been on board. I was sort o' stunned by the concussion, but I did not lose my senses altogether, for I managed to cast my arm round the mast that had fallen close by me. It was black and charred, and had been in a blaze when it fell; but the water had soon put it out, and it did not hurt me when I griped it."

"An' did the villains no seek to help ye?"

"I canna tell. When I came to myself,—that is, when I was just able to look about me, I could see nothing of the sma' boat anywhere, and nothing of the brig, barrin' bits o' wreck."

"They thocht ye had been blawn to pieces, and nae doot didna fash themsel's muckle to look for ye."

"Onyway, they made aff wi' speed; but to be sure it was early morning and hazy, so that I could not see far. There were two or three bits of only partially burnt rope at the upper end of the mast. I worked mysel' along till I got there, and then worked mysel' back to the thick end. I got the ropes knotted into one, and then I passed it round my body under the arms, and so lashed myself to the mast. The waves were buffeting me about right and left, and if I hadn't tied mysel' up that way ye wadna hae seen me here, Girzie, for I never could hae held on lang enough."

"Was ye no cauld?" queried Wattie.

"Aye, cauld and weary too before all was over, Wattie. Heaven only kens how the life kept in my body a' the while, for I floated about for more than thirty hours—all through that day, all through that night, and into the middle of the next day. I was numbed and stiff and mad wi' drouth, while the water was dashing me about and deaving me wi' its mighty roar that seemed like the voice o' God himsel' rebuking me for

whatever ill I had done in the world, and bringing to my mind every act of my life frae the time I was a bairn. I prayed for help and strength, and as I was praying the mighty voice seemed to soften doon to the low sweet sang o' a mither rocking her wean to sleep on her knee. Then that seemed to fade awa' too, and I became insensible."

"Puir sowl," ejaculated Girzie, deftly turning the herrings on to a plate.

"When I came to mysel' again," Falcon went on, breathing hard as if the memory renewed some of the anguish he had endured, "I was on the deck o' a ship wi' a number o' men about me. It was the king's frigate *Victory* that had picked me up. They were kindly folk from the captain down—it was the captain himsel' who had seen me first floating in the water. They took good care of me, and in a week I was able to be up and about."

"Guid be praised, it was a wonnerfu' deliverance."

"It was that, Girzie, woman. I was obliged to take service on board the frigate, and as she was out on a twelvemonth's cruise, I had no way of getting back here till that time was up. I made the best of the circumstances and was thankful. The captain was pleased with me, and a week ago when we put in at Southampton he gave me leave at once. I got a passage in a coasting schooner which was bound for Ayr, and here I am."

"Draw in your stool, syne, an' eat something," was Girzie's homely comment, adding as she was obeyed: "an' haena ye heard ought o' what's been gaun on here a' the while ye hae been awa'?"

"No a cheep. I wrote to Jeanie frae Malta, but I dinna ken even if she got the letter."

Girzie's head dipped over her plate as if anxious to pick her herring clean. They were eating with their fingers, forks being luxuries of which she only possessed one, and that was rusted : knives were almost as scarce.

She was puzzled. Jeanie again, always Jeanie. How was she to tell him?

"Tak' a daud o' bannock, man, an mak' yoursel' at hame," she said in a hurry, to prevent the question which she knew was coming, but could not make up her mind how to answer; "od, it's no every day Girzie Todd has company."

Wattie came to the rescue. He had brought his seat close to Falcon, whose story had been to him full of the liveliest interest, and who had a vague notion that in some way his own importance was increased the closer he got to the hero.

"And did ye no gang doon amang the fishes ava?" (slightly disappointed apparently on that score).

"No, Wattie, or you wouldna hae seen me here again."

"Had the king's ship guns?"

"Aye, big anes."

That was some consolation to Wattie for the loss of his vision of the kingdom of fishes, and he had innumerable childish questions to ask about the frigate and her guns, which Falcon, curbing his own desire and expecting every minute that Girzie would speak, good-naturedly endeavoured to satisfy.

"Do ye ken," said Wattie by-and-by, with a thoughtful expression, "I was wonnering what way it was Ivan Carrach's head didna set lowe to the house when he was here the nicht ye gaed awa', there was sic a bleeze a' ower him—far redder nor the peat."

"Carrach here on the night we sailed?" exclaimed Falcon, looking quickly at Girzie.

She was clearing the table, and as Wattie spoke her eyes flashed upon him frowningly.

"Aye, he was here that night," she answered indifferently.

"I did not know that he was a friend of yours," eyeing her curiously.

"Frien' o' mine!" sharply, "that he's no. He jist cam' to speir gin I had ony fish I could sell him as he hadna got eneuch to ser' him."

"Then it was something he said to you that caused you to seek me at the Port to warn me not to sail wi' him?"

"I warned ye for reasons o' my ain', an' ye didna heed. There's nae use fashin' aboot the why o't noo."

"Girzie," he said firmly as he rose, "ye ken mair about the loss o' the *Colin* than ye care to tell; but ye'll hae to tell some day."

"What gin I hae nocht to tell?"

"We'll see; but you have kept me all this time without saying a word o' what I am most anxious to hear. Hoo is Jeanie, and where is she?"

"She's weel eneuch for that matter, an' she's at Cairnieford," abruptly and with an uneasy glance at his face, to see if he suspected anything.

"At Cairnieford!—has she gone into service there?"

"Aye, in a kind o' way."

"Has anything happened to Adam and the old wife?"

"Oh they're baith livin' yet, and they're at Cairnieford, Adam met wi' an accident an' brak' his arm an' maist lost his life. But he's maist weel again noo, although he's no able to do onything but an orra job aboot the farm. Meg Lindsay's waur nor she was afore, and's no thocht to live lang."

"Poor Jeanie, she's had a sair time o't with all that."

"Aye, sair eneuch when she didna ken whaur to get bite or sup if it hadna been for Robin Gray."

"Heaven prosper him for it; he shall lose nothing by it if I live, an' I'm no that old but I may hope for the chance yet of proving myself grateful to those who have shown themselves friends when friends were wanted."

"Bode o' a silk gown an' ye'll surely get a sleeve o't, and there's no reason why ye shouldna get the whale o't afore ye die."

"I'll try for't any way, Girzie. But what gar'd the auld folk flit? Was the Laird pushing them about the rent?"

"Aye, an' they could dae naething without Jeanie forbye. Ye see the puir lassie, what wi' the trouble i' the bield itsel', an' what wi' the news o' your death, was jist wearin' her life out by inches, when Robin cam' an' took them awa' to Cairnieford a'thegither."

"The Lord be thanked that they had a friend able and

willing to help them. The thocht o' what he has done gars my heart loup wi' gratitude. I'll awa' to them at once. I canna rest till I hae seen them, and, fegs, I'm almost as anxious to get a gripe o' Cairnie's hand as to see Jeanie and hear her welcome hame."

His face was glowing with the pleasure an honest nature feels in recognizing the nobility of another. He was moving to the door when he was arrested by Girzie saying sharply—

"Ye shouldna gang out the nicht. It'll be late afore ye win there, an' it's no just fair no to gie them ony warnin' o' your coming. Ye maun min' they hae a' been mournin' for ye as for ane that was dead, an' ye dinna ken what ill ye might dae if ye was jist to stap in on them afore they had ony ettling that ye was in the land o' the livin'."

"No fear, they'll be all the more delighted with the surprise."

"I'm no sae sure aboot that. Ye dinna ken what changes tak' place after ane's dead an' buried, as ye hae been for near a year."

"What are ye drivin' at?" he said, turning round, perplexed, for her manner seemed as strange as that night she had waited for him at the Port.

"Naething but what ye might hae jaloused frae what I hae said a'ready. Do ye min' what I tauld ye afore ye gaed awa'?"

"Aye, ye wanted me no to sail in the *Colin*."

"An' I said that gin ye did, ye would never be 'guidman to Jeanie Lindsay. I didna expec' my words to come true jist in the way they hae dune; but true ye'll fin' them."

His heart, which a moment before had been swelling with pleasurable anticipations of the meeting with Jeanie, and o' the joy which his unexpected return safe and well would inspire, suddenly collapsed with vague fear, like a soap-bubble when touched by the finger.

"In God's name, what's wrang?" he said huskily, and staring fixedly at the woman.

"Weel, I didna want to tell ye o't, but I suppose ye may as weel hear't frae me as frae ony ither body, an' as ye canna gang mony staps without some ane telling ye, I'll do't mysel' —Jeanie's married."

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE LAST HOPE.

"She's fair and fause that causes my smart,  
I lo'ed her muckle and lang ;  
She's broken her vow, she's broken my heart,  
And I may e'en gae hang."—*Burns*.

FALCON stood with blank stupefied face looking at Girzie, as one might do who listens to eerie words spoken from a distance, and feels a terror creep through the blood, while yet the meaning is indistinct. As if seeking the source of that mysterious voice, he by-and-by slowly looked round the dingy little chamber.

"Aye, an' there was sic fun as ye never saw at the hamecoming," exclaimed Wattie, chuckling over the memory of the feast of which he had been a partaker with the others.

That roused him. The suggestion of the merrymaking and the feast brought his wandering thoughts back to the bare fact. The form of the old fishwife, standing before him with hands resting on her hips, watching with her keen friendly eyes, and of her son, crouching by the fire, chuckling over that pleasant memory, became plain to him again; and the expression of stupefaction gave place to a dark scowl.

"Married!" he ejaculated with fierce bitterness. "Jeanie's married?—to wha?"

"Deed, she jist married him that was her best frien', when she thocht ye was dead—Cairnieford himsel'."

"What! a man near as auld's her father," he began with a

hoarse laugh that seemed to wring his heart. Then making a violent effort to keep cool, to hold back the fever that was tingling through his veins—"When did it happen?"

"At the end o' hairst."

"So soon?—Oh, I wish to Heaven I had been drooned, rather than have come back to learn this. She could forget me in twa or three months, an' gie hersel' to an auld man like Cairnieford, just for meat an' drink an' claes! She that said she would wait for me, come what might. I was a fool—a fool to lippen to her. But I may be thankful I hae missed her—she never cared a button for me—she couldna hae cared or she would never hae dune this. She wasna grieved that I gaed awa', and no doubt she was glad to hear that I could never come back, and that was why she was so ready to believe 't."

He spoke with wild bitterness—evidently too frenzied to understand what he was saying.

"Hoots, man, I wonner to hear ye," broke in Girzie sharply. "What was the lassie to do? She was clean distractit about the loss o' ye. But gin ye had been really drooned, as we a' believed ye was, would it hae brocht ye back to life or dune ye ony guid, for Jeanie to hae let her faither an' mither starve, and hersel' pine awa' to the kirk-yard? Gae 'wa, gin there's onybody to blame, it's yoursel', for flinging awa' to unknown parts an' no lettin' us ken whether ye was livin' or dead."

This common-sense view of the case might have had a proper effect upon him at another time; but at present he was smarting under the severest pangs a faithful heart can know. The one object which had absorbed all the strength and hope of his life had been suddenly swept away from him, and he was like a ship labouring in a storm without compass or beacon to guide the mariner to a haven.

In such a condition he was not likely to appreciate Girzie's sensible remarks; and instead of replying to them he grasped his stick savagely, wheeled about, and strode out of the cot.

Girzie went to the door to look after him, half intending to

call him back. The cold frosty wind blew sharp in her face, and the darkness only permitted her to obtain a glimpse of his form as he crossed the feeble ray of light shining from a cotter's window, and disappeared immediately.

"There'll be fine doings the morn," she said as she closed the door. "I'll hae to be ower braw an' early to let them ken wha's come hame. Hech, sirs, but he was sair ta'en up aboot it, and there's nae saying what he may dae. But there was nae use trying to dae ony guid wi' him the nicht. There'll be an unco shine, or I'm mista'en."

Falcon had been stunned by the revelation, the truth of which had been thrust on him with singular force by Wattie's simple exclamation about the "hame-coming." But for that he would have been slow to credit the announcement in spite of all the seriousness of Girzie's manner. Then a sharp pain had thrilled him and he had been stirred to a species of blind frenzy, in which he saw only a deceitful woman who had been false and treacherous to the love she had plighted.

He had been working and striving to make a home for her; every thought and hope of his life had been concentrated on her, and now all combined with every hardship he had endured to render her falsehood the more base and cruel. An army of angry thoughts were marching and countermarching—all in order of battle—through his mind as he strode furiously up the narrow dark street.

He had no idea as to his destination when he had so abruptly left Girzie's cot. He had in an angry way felt that as she spoke in defence of Jeanie she could not sympathize with him; dimly, too, he had felt that if he were to remain, it would only be to make a fool of himself by uttering the passionate words which were seething in his brain, and so he had wheeled about and left her.

It was all very well for *her* to believe that he had been drowned; but even if it had been true, she would not have been in such a hurry to marry if she had ever cared for him with one-half the fervour with which he had been devoted to her. That was the burden of the unuttered wail that was

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ringing in his brain, with a sound as sharp and shrill to him as if some one had been shrieking it in his ears.

He took no account of the circumstances Girzie had explained to him ; he made no allowances for the pressure that had overborne the opposition of Jeanie's own desires. How could he ? It is never an easy thing for one to realize the changes consequent on one's death ; and least of all when one returns to life, as it were, and finds the changes made, and when the heart is quivering with violent wrath and anguish. The lights from the windows of the houses flashed upon him as he strode rapidly up the street, and those flashes of light only served to render the darkness of the night deeper. Several stumbles on the uneven road, and most of all the keen frosty wind which came whistling round the houses up from the sea, had the effect of recalling him in some degree to his calmer self.

So, by the time he had reached the head of the brae, and was turning into the dark country road where the town ended in a few straggling cottages, it suddenly occurred to him that whilst he was blaming Jeanie for being so ready to take advantage of the report of his death, he was a little too ready himself in crediting the story of her marriage. That was quite a new idea. Girzie might have been jesting with him, and he had left her so abruptly that he had not given her time to explain the hoax.

Aye, but she spoke too plainly to be misunderstood ; and there could be no question that Wattie's exclamation was genuine. Still it might be. At any rate he ought in justice to Jeanie to take some immediate step to confirm the statement he had received or prove its falseness.

It was the drowning man clutching at a straw ; and never did one in peril of life clutch more eagerly at the shadow of hope.

He had turned already to retrace his steps when he observed a black line rising up through the darkness of the night. It was the kirk-steeple, and that suggested so him the surest way of setting his doubts at rest with the least delay.

He proceeded straight to the manse—a plain white-washed house which was separated from the kirkyard only by a row of firs, a low wall, and a long strip of garden. A little gate in the wall communicated with the graveyard and the kirk, so that every Sabbath the minister had only to traverse the length of his garden and step into his pulpit.

The glebe, consisting of about twenty acres of land, lay behind the manse. The corn and wheat stacks, the byre and cart-shed, stood close by the house, and gave it the appearance of a farm-steading.

The minister had just returned from a hard day's work visiting his country parishioners, whose dwellings lay at such distances apart that he had walked over thirty miles since breakfast time; and would have had to walk farther if it had not been for the occasional "lifts" he obtained in cart or gig that happened to be journeying his way. He possessed what is regarded as one of the prime qualifications for a rural Scottish pastorship, considerable capabilities as a pedestrian. Exercise agreed with his hearty nature, and sent the exhilarated blood dancing through his veins, making him feel comfortable in spite of the frost and fatigue.

Fatigued enough he was when he reached home; and it was not altogether agreeable to have the little leisure he had so well earned disturbed by that indication of a call to new duties supplied by the intimation of the buxom servant lass—

"There's a man wantin' to see ye this minute, maister."

"Bid him come ben, lass," was Mr. Monduff's cheery answer.

But the minister's wife—a little body with a serious face that reflected a placid disposition—did not regard the interruption quite so lightly as her husband. She, however, showed no more displeasure than might be implied in looking with a grave expression at the personage who was ushered into the homely parlour, as if by that means mildly rebuking him for disturbing the leisure of her husband.

Both minister and minister's wife, however, started with surprise and pleasure as soon as the light fell on the visitor's face.

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"Preserve us!" they exclaimed together; "it's James Falcon come back."

And in an instant his hands were seized by the kindly couple, and he was forced on to a chair in front of the cheery fire.

"Aye, it's me, Mr. Monduff," he said dazedly; "but don't ask me anything till you have answered me one question."

"I'll answer a dozen of them first, if you like. Man, we're so well pleased to see you safe that we can afford to wait to learn how you come to be so."

Falcon looked at the serious face of Mrs. Monduff; probably he felt that the woman's heart would understand the anguish of his own best.

"Is it true that Jeanie Lindsay's married?"

The minister and his wife exchanged a quick glance. Then the latter answered him gravely, but with sympathy in the low tone—

"Yes, it's true—she has married a good, warm-hearted man."

Falcon's eyes slowly descended to the floor and rested there. He passed his hand over his head, bowing it forward on his chest, and his body was bent as if his muscles had become relaxed and powerless.

The minister and his wife eyed him with kindly pity; but neither spoke for several minutes. Then, when he began to breathe heavily, Mr. Monduff touched him on the shoulder.

"What's wrang wi' you, James?" he said.

Falcon looked up with a shudder, like one waking from a nightmare.

"It's my whole life that's wrang—for it was a' bound up in that woman. Ye needna tell me that it was sinful to care so much for ony human creature—I ken a' that; but body and soul I was devoted to her. I would hae gi'en my life ony day if it could hae spared her a pain. And now!—it's a' by; it's a' by, and I carena what comes o' me."

Mrs. Monduff silently placed her hand on his, in that simple way showing the woman's sympathy for the distressed lover.

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But the minister leaned back on his chair, his ruddy visage acquiring a solemn expression.

"You're no quite sensible of the full meaning o' your words, James," he said presently; "wherefore I'll make no remarks on them. Some day I'll aiblins show ye what a sorry thing it would be for you if you were taken at your word. Meanwhile it vexes me to think that a lad like you, who has been trained in a manner under my own hand, should ever have been able to speak that way, no matter what the provocation might be."

"Ah, sir, you don't, you can't understand what I am suffering."

"Maybe no, and maybe in consequence I'm the better able to see the cure for your malady."

"Cure! There is none. What cure can there be for the destruction of the dearest object of one's life? When every spark of courage a man owned is crushed out wi' the sense that there is nothing to hope for, nothing to live for—what is there that can kindle his courage again? If a man's two arms are nipped off at the shoulders, is there anything in the world that can stick them on again?"

"That's a metaphorical way of putting it; but metaphors are kittle things to handle. They sound unco grand, but they can seldom hand up against a blast of common sense. You hae got your arms yet, and I hope they'll do some good work before you die, for all your present distress. No doubt when we have set our hearts upon a thing and lose it, we cannot help skirling out and feeling as if the world had a' gane wrang. But, man, there's ay a compensation somewhere for the worst of ills, and there's a compensation for yours too."

"I wish I could see it then," he cried bitterly, and with an impulse to rise and quit the house at once to avoid further discussion.

"You said just now that you would hae gi'en your life at any minute to spare the lass a pain. Did you no?"

"Aye, and I would hae done it too, gladly."

"Then, if you mean what you say, instead o' talking in the

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fashion you have been doing about Jeanie's marriage, you ought to thank God that in the time of sorest distress—distress that was as much owing to the news of your death as to the misfortunes of her family—there was a friend to help her out of her trouble. That ought to be some compensation to you for the loss of her yourself."

Falcon rose, confused and agitated.

"Thank you, Mr. Monduff, thank you. I cannot view the matter so calmly as you do yet. But I'll go now. I did not mean to stay so long. Good night."

"Where are you going to?" said the minister, staying him, and not quite sure that it was safe to permit him to go away in his present excited condition; "to Clashgirn?"

"No, not there. I did not think about it."

"Aye, well, you'd better stay here to-night. You look wearied, and the mistress will make up a bed for you directly. We'll not speak any more about this matter, and you'll be more yourself after you've had a sleep."

Falcon objected, but the minister insisted and the minister's wife persuaded, so that he was forced to yield.

A bed was speedily prepared for him in a cupboard-like chamber off the parlour, and as soon as it was ready Falcon retired to it.

He did not undress, but threw himself on the bed with a sense of severe physical as well as mental exhaustion. His pulse throbbed violently; his head ached and burned as if his brain had been on fire.

When Mr. Monduff called him next morning, he received no answer. Opening the door, he entered the chamber and found it untenanted.

Falcon had gone—when, they could not discover; but the servant had been up at six o'clock, and she had not heard him moving. The front door had been unbolted; but that had not excited the girl's alarm in the least, as it was frequently left so all night.

"He was so wild-like last night that I was afraid to let him go," said the minister to his wife. "I hope the lad may

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not be driven in his crazy state to do some harm to himself or other folk. I should ha'e kept him fast wi' lock and key."

And after breakfast the minister sallied forth in search of Falcon.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### BROKEN HEARTS.

"For sure 'twould break thy tender heart  
My breaking heart to see;  
Wi' a' the wrangs and waes it tholed,  
And yet maun thole for thee."—*R. Jamieson.*

THE guidman of Cairnieford was up early on the dark December morning which succeeded the night of James Falcon's return. He was bound for a distant market, where he proposed to buy a lot of sheep and expected to get a bargain. The guidwife made his breakfast, fastened his plaid across his shoulders, and gave him kindly counsel to be careful of the road coming home if it happened to be dark before he started.

Robin promised obedience, though he declared at the same time he had ridden the road "hunners o' times in a' kinds o' weathers and never met in wi' onything waur nor himself."

Jeanie watched him ride away in the hazy morning light and disappear at the end of the by-road. Her cheeks had recovered some of their former bloom, and her form much of its plumpness, since she had been married; and she looked now a sonsy, good-tempered, and happy wife.

She was about to return to the house when she heard some of the hens cackling proudly in the little thicket of firs and beeches at the back of the steading; and like a thrifty farmer's wife she started immediately in search of the eggs, which were prized all the more because of their scarcity at this season.

She entered the thicket and began her search at a pile of

fir branches which had been hewn down for winter firewood, and the numerous recesses in which presented favourable-looking hiding-places for wily hens to deposit their eggs.

Jeanie heard the crisp earth and the dead frosted bits of branches which were thickly strewn about crackling under the footsteps of somebody approaching. As she passed round the high pile of firewood, bending low to examine the nooks, she noticed a man coming toward her. She thought from the cursory glimpse she had obtained that he was one of the men belonging to the place, and continued her inspection unheeding.

She passed round the pile of wood slowly to the side from which she had observed the man, and there he stood before her.

Pale, haggard, with tousled hair, ruffled clothes, and a general appearance of wild disorder, the man stood watching her.

She gazed at him a moment, and then she flung up her hands with a shriek that echoed throughout the thicket and sank moaning to the ground.

He lifted her up. She was not unconscious, and she shuddered at his touch. He seemed sensible of her repulsion, and he placed her on a heap of the fir branches, drawing back a pace to look at her. She covered her eyes with her hands, as if to hide him from her sight.

"Jeanie, I hae come back," he said presently in a hard cold tone.

She made no answer, but she rocked her body to and fro, sobbing wildly.

He spoke again slowly.

"I hae come back, Jeanie, to find that ye shudder at my touch—that ye canna bear to look me in the face. And yet it was you that no so very lang syne clasped your arms around my neck, and told me that I might leave you without fear of change, for that you would bide my coming faithfully. Hae ye kept your word?"

He bent close to her, hissing the question in her ear.



She seemed to writhe under his approach, and still with hands on her eyes she swayed to and fro, moaning.

"They tauld me ye were drooned," she cried in anguish. "They tauld me ye were drooned, and oh my heart was sair to think it. But ye made nae sign that ye were living, and a' body spoke as though there was nae doot—as though there could be nane. There wasna aye to whisper a breath o' hope and what could I do—what could I do but believe when the proof was so strong?"

"Ye could ha'e waited a wee for confirmation o' the news. Oh, woman, I would ha'e waited a hundred years befo're I would ha'e cast you so utterly from my breast as to take another in my arms."

"And I would ha'e waited for ever, had I been my lanc. But they pressed me sair on a' hands. I was wae, wae, and heart-broken; I didna care what cam' o' me; but I thocht it was a sin to turn awa' frae the wark that was set fornenst me; and I thocht that you, looking at me frae the ither world, would ken what feelings moved me, and would say I had done weel. That was why I married, though my heart was wi' you."

The violence of her distress, the sad sincerity of her voice, exerted a powerful influence upon him. He seemed to waken suddenly from a fever, in which all things had been distorted in his mind, to the consciousness that she had been true to him in heart—that she had loved him—that she still loved him.

He dropped down beside her, and threw his arms round her.

"Jeanie, Jeanie!" he cried passionately, "ye are mine yet, ye shall be mine in spite o' a' the marriages on earth. What power—what richt has a minister's prayer to part our lives—to fill the years that are before us wi' lingering misery? It shall ha'e none. Ye are mine, Jeanie, my ain, and nobody else has a richt to claim you. Rise up, then, and come awa' from this place, and in another country we'll find a home and happiness."

With a stifled cry of horror she wrenched herself from his

arms, and sprang to her feet. Her hands were withdrawn from her eyes now, and she regarded him with wild alarm, whilst her cheeks, which a moment before had been pallid and cold, became crimson.

"Awa', man, awa'," she exclaimed with look and voice of horror; "that's no Jeames Falcon wha has risen from the dead—for he would hae pitied me and tried to strengthen me for the cruel duty I maun do. It's the evil ane himsel' in my puir lad's body that's come to tempt me to my shame."

He bowed his head before her indignation, and for the moment could not meet her gaze.

"Lord help me, Lord help me," he groaned; "I believe I'm crazed. Ye are richt, it was a mad thought—a villainous thought. I'll try to put it away from me. I *shall* put it away; only give me a little while to master myself. Last nicht I came back, and last nicht I learned you were married. My head's been in a creel ever since, and I scarcely ken what I do, or say, or think."

"Oh, why did you no come hame sooner—why did ye send nae word that ye were livin'?"

"I couldna win hame, but I sent a letter, and that ye never got, I suppose."

"Never, or I wouldna hae been here the day."

He pressed his head tightly between his hands, as if by that means to subdue its violent throbbing, and so obtain a calmer view of the position.

"Aye, aye, its been a' bad luck that has come between us and parted us for ever," he went on hoarsely and hopelessly; "but I'm no the villain you might think me from what I hae said. I didna come here thinking o' that. I came just to speak wi' you once again—to look at ye—and gang awa'."

Her indignation and her fear of him had quite disappeared now. Above the storm of different emotions which was raging in her breast, pity for him rose strongest of all. She approached him slowly and placed her hands on his head soothingly. He snatched the hands between his own and kissed them frenziedly.

"Dinna do that," she sobbed, trembling as with intense cold.  
"Ah, dinna do that, for it frichtens me and minds me o' what you were saying enoo. I canna thole to think o' that, because it would make the sorrow I hae to bear a' the sairer if I had to think o' ye as ane that would do a wrang act."

"No man shall ever say I wrangled him," said Falcon proudly and releasing her hands.

"I believe that. I'll never doubt it again. Ye're speaking like yourself' noo, and it comforts me to hear ye. But, Jeamie, we may do wrang in thocht to oursel's and others, and there's only ae way that we can ever hope to win peace o' mind by."

"And that way?"

"Is to part noo, and never—never meet again in this world."

Her hands were clasped. She gazed appealingly at him, but he did not raise his head or speak for a long time. When he did look up, his face was white and his lips were quivering.

"Aye, that's a' we can do now. It's cowardly to sob and greet like a wean when the road lies before me, dreary though it be."

"Ye'll forget a' this, and I'll pray day and nicht that Heaven will send ye happy days."

"I'll no forget, but maybe I may obtain distraction in hard work and new scenes. Folk say that time cures a' ills, and I could maist believe that, seeing that you looked so content before you saw me" (bitterly).

"Jeamie, let me tell ye a' that's passed since ye gaed awa'," she said quietly, although smarting under the sting of his reproach; "and when ye hae heard ye'll be better able to judge how far I am to blame for what pain ye are suffering."

She told him everything simply as it had occurred, and he listened in moody silence. But when she had finished he rose to his feet.

"Thank you, Jeanie," he said in a calmer tone than he had yet spoken; "what you hae said proves to me that nae blame can rest on you. I would hae thought that anyway if I had

only had time to think the matter fairly out. But there's one to whose villain's work you and I both owe what ill has happened us, and I'll bring him to the gallows for't."

"Wha do ye mean?"

"Ivan Carrach, who was skipper o' the *Colin*."

And he briefly explained to her how the brig had been burned, how he had escaped, and what had been the cause of his long absence.

"I'll no trouble you again, Jeanie," he said in conclusion; "this is the last time I'll ever look on your dear face. Dinna shrink frae me or fear me because I call it dear. My anger and my frenzy are by now, and I'm calm. But your face will ay be dear to me although I may never look on it again. I'll never come back here: as soon as I hae got hand o' Carrach, I'll leave the country, and ye can think o' me as though I had been dead and had never come here to disturb the peace o' your hame wi' memories o' days that were very pleasant to us."

His voice quivered as he spoke, and burning tears started to his eyes. She allowed him to clasp her hands now without hesitation, and her half-stifled sobs declared how violently her heart was agitated since the moment of parting had arrived.

It was a sad parting, for it was lightened by no gleam of hope: it was like the parting which death makes. They had spoken much, but they had thought and felt far more than their words indicated during the little time they had been together. The bitter experience of a life was concentrated in that brief space, and the issue was a noble one. The suppressed love she had borne the man had been suddenly roused into new existence, and had fought hard with her sense of wifely duty and gratitude to the absent husband. The contest had closed in the stern recognition of the true path before her; and whatever agony it might cost her, she was ready to tear from her breast the love that had been once her happiness, but was now a sin.

He had passed through the frenzy of his shattered hopes, the storm of angry passions, and had reached the light wherein he saw how much he had wronged her by his thoughts of

the past night and how much he owed her now. It seemed to him as if he heard the voice of his dead love loudly bidding him depart from her and leave her to what peace she might obtain from the knowledge that he was never to cross her path any more.

Yet they lingered with a fatal fascination over the love they were burying in this separation. Their hearts might ache and yearn; but they were never again to find voice for the pain or hope, never again to reach the light of lovers' sympathy.

"It maun be, it maun be," she cried at last; "a' that I am suffering the noo, a' the weary pain that's tugging at my heart in the thocht o' parting wi' ye, but tells me the stronger that we maun never meet on this earth mair. Oh I lo'ed ye, Jeannie, very dearly. I lo'e ye yet—the Lord aboon forgive me—but I am Robin Gray's wife, and I maun be faithful to him wha's been guid and true to me. Help me, help me, Jeannie, and gang awa'."

"God keep ye, Jeannie," he gasped, with unutterable misery and compassion choking his voice. "I see noo that I haena the warst to bear. I wish in my soul that I had never come hame again, or that we had never loved as we hae done. God keep ye, and bless ye, and gie ye strength, for we hae little in oursel's. But ye shall never be troubled wi' the sicht o' me again, and if I could I would bury my very name in the bottomless pit that ye might never mair be startled even by the sound o't. A' that man can do to help ye to be a true wife I'll do for the sake o' the love I bear ye. I canna say ony mair."

With an uncontrollable impulse he folded his arms round her and kissed her passionately, whilst scalding tears were on their faces.

"Gae'wa, gae'wa," she cried wildly, tearing herself from his arms; "and Heaven guide ye to happiness, if there be ony in this warl'd."

She turned from him, blind with anguish, and tottered away toward the house.

He stood dumbly gazing after her; and as she disappeared

round the corner of a shed, without having dared to look back once, his whole heart seemed to burst in one great sob.

"God bless ye, Jeanie," he faltered, and the words yearningly followed her.

He gazed vacantly for a long time at the place where he had caught the last glimpse of her retreating form, and then, with a dull hopeless face, he turned slowly away.

Moving toward the road, he paused often to look back, as if with the vain hope that he might see her once again. But slowly as he moved down the glen with the clear burn rippling and murmuring by his side, gradually the house and every vestige of her home were screened from his eyes by intervening trees—bare, gaunt, and dead, like his own hopes.

He went down to the shore and seated himself on a detached boulder of rock. The red winter sun was glinting over the rolling waves, and the waves, as they kissed the beach foamily and rolled back, seemed to moan despairingly in unison with his miserable thoughts. The sharp wind beat upon his cheeks—but he was insensible to its biting cold. He gazed steadily out over the tossing waters, as if he found some comfort in their unceasing commotion. By-and-by the fantasy seized him that the waves were beckoning and calling to him.

"Aye, aye," he groaned; "out yonder lies my home. I'll be wi' you soon (moving his hand as to a friend in the distance), but first I must find Carrach, for he has wrought a' this wrang to her and me—curse him! curse him! curse him!"

He rose and paced the beach excitedly. His despair seemed to find vent and even relief in his furious wrath against the man to whom he attributed all his misfortune. He proposed to visit Clashgirn, and discover from the Laird where the skipper might be found, and also obtain his assistance in bringing him to punishment. But it was late in the afternoon before he reached his old home.

When Jeanie had quitted him she had paused a few minutes as soon as the corner of the house hid her from his sight. She had been too much confused to think of how the effects of the violent agitation she had undergone might be concealed from

the eyes of her father and mother, and most of all from those of the servants.

She wiped her face with her apron, but she felt that it was parched and white. She looked timidly about, and was not disturbed by discovering any observer. Then she stole to the house, more like a thief, she felt, than the mistress of it, without meeting her father or any of the lassies. She reached her bed-room, washed herself, and carefully dried her face; but when she looked in the little mirror she was startled by the change which had come over it in the last hour, and which all her efforts were powerless to remove. The experience of an age was marked upon it, and it seemed to her almost haggard.

She turned away frightened, and bathed her face in the cold water again. How was she to meet Robin with such a woe-stricken look as that? She must not make him unhappy too by telling him what had happened—that is, not until she was able to speak quietly about it, and so relieve his kind heart of all fear or pain on her account.

That was the one thing clear to her mind; that nothing must be said about that sad meeting in the thicket meanwhile. It was the first time Jeanie had ever had anything to hide, and she was ashamed of it; but it was for his sake, not her own. She had noticed on one or two occasions how a passing reference to Falcon had caused him to glance uneasily at her. Why should she disturb him now by letting him know what misery she was suffering?

No, she would wait until she had taught herself to think and speak quietly of the matter, and then he might be told all about it when she would be able to assure him at the same time of her own content.

So when her father asked what was the matter with her, she answered that she was not "just weel," and busied herself with her household affairs, preparing to meet her husband with a calm face, and her great sorrow hidden in her breast.

It was a false step she was taking; but it was a generous motive that urged her to it. How was she to guess what was to follow?

## CHAPTER XVI.

## PAWKY REYNARD.

"He's a rare auld man, wi' a wig on his pow,  
An' a sneishag mull to prie, O;  
He becks an' he bows to high and to low,  
An' he cheats them a' for his fee, O."—*Old Song.*

THE Laird had been down at the byre looking over his cattle, and he was peaceably stepping up the short avenue to the house when he heard somebody striding rapidly after him. He glanced over his shoulder, and observing a stranger, halted and wheeled about to learn his mission.

The stranger was by his side in a moment.

"Well, I hope you're glad to see me back again, although I dinna ken why I should hope that, seeing I hae so little pleasure in't mysel'," was the somewhat gruff salutation of the stranger.

The Laird's clean-shaven chin dropped, and his mouth remained open; he dropped his staff, and what was of more consequence, he dropped his snuff-box, spilling the precious contents.

"It canna be you!" he stammered, wishing that he could reach the house with one step, and yet quite unable to move a limb.

"Aye, but it's just me, unfortunately," said Falcon drily, and picking up the staff he placed it in McWhapple's hand.

The Laird leaned on his staff, and shivered violently as with fright—not the fright which superstition inspires. There was more fear roused in his thin, dried, pawky body by the reappearance of the living man than all the ghosts of the kirkyard marching up the avenue in a band could have produced. He eyed him from head to foot, and still shivering stooped to pick up his snuff-box.

"Od, its extraordinar'," he exclaimed, as he raised himself, "an' me has been mourning for ye this twomond as though ye'd been dead, and you no dead ava!"

"I'm sorry you haes wasted so much useful grief for a chield wha's so ungrateful as to come to life again."

"Come to life again—aye, man, it's jist like that," exclaimed McWhapple, evidently uncomfortable, and searching Falcon's face with cunning eyes, almost as if trying to discover whether he came with friendly intent or the reverse. "I can scarcely believe it's you yet. But come your ways to the house, and let us ken a' about it."

As they walked together the Laird watched his companion with side-long glances, and whenever he found himself observed, he uttered an exclamation of marvel, as if to indicate that his glances were purely those of natural wonder and satisfaction.

Without having encountered any one, they entered the parlour in which the important interview regarding the farm of Askaig had been held, and from which all Falcon's mishaps dated.

The Laird placed a decanter and glasses on the table—he kept them in the cupboard at the side of the chimney, so that they were always handy, and always locked up by himself. He emptied a full glass of the whisky—a very unusual thing for him to do—and sunk back on his easy chair, staring open-mouthed at his visitor.

Falcon, partly by accident, partly by the recall of old habit in association with the place, planted himself on the hearth much as he had done on the day of that interview he remembered so bitterly. He observed that the place was exactly as he had left it, and whilst he was indifferently glancing round, the Laird was summing up the changes in him.

First, he was bronzed by the sun: that added to his apparent age. Next, he had been suffering greatly, and that had imparted a nervous firmness to the lips, which denoted that he would be an unflinching and uncompromising foe. Altogether, he looked much older, sadder, and shrewder than many men who had ten years the advantage of him.

These observations did not apparently in the least comfort McWhapple, for two or three times that shivering fit touched

him as if threatening to return. The whisky, however, kept it off, and he continued to look at him with an expression of astonishment, suspicion, and cunning watchfulness all combined. Certainly the Laird's conduct was as peculiar as the occasion of it. He was not usually subject to any great display of surprise; and even at this moment it did not seem to be so much surprise that moved him as a potent fear of something about to happen.

Falcon, however, attributed all this discomposure to the mere effect of his unexpected return, and to relieve him told him at once how he had escaped.

"Od, it's the most extraordinar' thing I ever heard," exclaimed McWhapple after a pause; "and noo that ye hae got back, I suppose you hae heard that your auld sweetheart's married?"

"Aye, I hae seen her" (wincing).

"Hae ye so! And what do you intend to do now?"

"Go away again."

"When?" (with marked eagerness).

"As soon as I hae performed a duty I owe you and others."

"What may that be?"

"Did you lose muckle by the *Colin*?"

"No so-muckle as I might hae done" (uneasily), "for she was gey well insured."

"Humph" (eyeing him curiously). "Did Carrach lose onything by it?"

"I couldna say exactly; he had a share o' the cargo and got his share o' the insurance; but, on the other hand, he lost a heap o' time, and the chance o' what he was to make by the cargo he was to bring hame."

"That's queer" (thoughtfully).

"What's queer?" (sharply, and moving uncomfortably on his seat).

"About Carrach. Where is he?"

"He was at Greenock yesterday, I believe, and I'm expecting him here in a day or twa. But what are ye driving at wi' a' these questions?"

"At a serious matter to you, and at a matter that has ruined my—but never mind that. Hae you ony suspicion how the brig was burnt?"

The Laird slowly searched the corners of his box for a pinch of snuff.

"Weel, Jeames, if you compel me to answer that question, I'll hae to say something unpleasant."

"Say it, then."

"As you like. Then, the proofs that I got privately argued strongly that she was set on fire purposely."

"Just so; and by whom?"

"By yoursel'."

"By me—what for?"

"Out o' spite against me for no doing what you wanted me to do. But I hae kept that under my thumb, and I commanded Carrach never to speak o't to anybody, so that ye need fear naething. But, Jeames, if it was true, it was a bad payment to me for a' that I hae done for you."

"So it would hae been if it had been true; but that's the very thing I am to bide here for a week or two to prove—that it was not true, and that it was Carrach himself who fired the brig."

The Laird shook his head doubtingly.

"I'm glad to ken that you weren't so vicious as to do such a thing against me; but you'll find it a stiff job to bring hame that charge to Carrach when he has the affidavits o' a' the men on his side."

"That does not matter; Hutcheson and I saw him."

"Aye! and where is Hutcheson?"

Falcon was silent; for the question reminded him sharply that the vengeance he had calculated upon taking so promptly was utterly beyond his reach until he could produce Hutcheson to corroborate his own evidence.

"I must find him," he said at length.

"I'm misdoubting that'll take you a lang while; for he hasn't been back here since he gaed awa in the unfortunate *Colin*."

"Never mind, I'll find him. The insurance agent will perhaps be able to tell me in what ship he sailed, and I'll find him."

McWhapple gave vent to that peculiarly Scotch ejaculation which is made with closed lips; the only combination of letters which can in any way represent the sound being, "oom-hoo." Then, after having apparently thought over the matter, he said—

"You're determined to pursue this affair?"

"Aye, till he has been hanged—curse him."

"What makes ye so wild against him?"

"Because a' the bad luck that's happened me has been brought about by his work."

"I understand what you mean; but do you intend to take ony advice frae me regarding the business?"

"I expect both your advice and help; for surely you have some interest in it, seeing that you still employ the villain."

"Oh, surely, I hae a very great interest in it, and you shall hae both my advice and help. My advice, however, you're no like to take, for it is just to let sleeping dogs lie, or, at any rate, be cannie in touching them. I'm no misdoubting a word o' what you say; but Carrach has the upper hand o' ye the now, and if he heard that you were trying to bring such a charge against him, do you think he'd hand his tongue about you?"

"What could he do?"

"Put a stop to your ever finding Hutcheson. He's got the proof against ye, and he'd just clap ye into jail in a minute. Ye'd be tried and transported—aiblins hanged—afore ye ken'd whare ye was. That's what he could do."

"I'll give him the chance," said Falcon resolutely, and McWhapple's hawk eyes twinkled feebly.

"Then ye'll get a halter for your pains, I'm thinking. Na, na, lad, ye must gang about it in a sensible way. Ye'll say nothing to the insurance agent yet. You'll just bide a wee till Carrach comes here, and syne I'll find out frae him in a friendly way what ship it was Hutcheson sailed in. Syne

you'll gang after him and bring him back here, and then ye'll be able to speak out. That's the sensible way o' proceeding, and if ye winna take it, I wash my hands o' the matter a'thegither."

Falcon was chagrined and moody at the prospect of delay; but it seemed clear to him that, as the Laird put it, there was no other course to take with any prospect of success.

He did not observe with what nervous eagerness his counsellor scanned his countenance, as if to read his decision before it was pronounced.

"I believe you're right, Laird," he said weariedly; "and there's no help for it. But I don't care how long it may be before I reach him. I'll not give up the chase until he has paid wi' his life for a' the misery he has wrought to me and Jeanie."

"Man, that's an unco vicious spirit to work wi'. You should be satisfied wi' trying to get justice done."

"Oh aye, I'll be satisfied wi' justice when it's done."

"Oom—hoo," ejaculated the Laird again, his head making a dab, and his breath coming more freely than it had done during the interview; "and where are you to bide till Carrach comes? It wouldna do for him to find ye here if I'm to get onything out o' him."

"I don't mean to stay here—it's too near Cairnieford, and I want to get as far from there as possible."

"You ken best about that; but I canna see that you should fash yoursel' regardin' a woman that was ready to loup at the first offer she got as soon as ye were out o' sicht——"

"Stop—I'll let no man speak an ill word about her in my presence."

And the fury that flashed to his visage showed that it would be dangerous for any man to attempt it.

"Oh, just as ye like; but, as I was about to remark, it'll no do for ye to be bidin' at ouy o' the inns either; so ye might gang ower by to Askaig. There's naebody occupying the house but the ploughman and his wife, and they can make up a bed for ye in ane o' the empty rooms. Ye'll no be particular about furniture for the wee while ye'll hae to bide there."

"I'll go at once."

"Ye'd better hae a bite o' something to eat first and tak a dram. Ye look unco cauld and worn like."

He summoned his housekeeper, Mrs. Begg; and as soon as that worthy woman could recover from the surprise and pleasure of seeing James Falcon in the flesh again, she hastened to procure some food.

Falcon was really worse than he looked; for he had eaten nothing since the meal he had made at Girzie Todd's, and he had passed through much exhausting excitement. Strong as he was, even his constitution bent before the terrible emotions which had been raging in him for the last twenty hours, and the exposure to the cold on the beach. He was, however, as yet, too sick in mind to take any note of bodily fatigue or pain.

As soon as he had partaken of the plentiful repast which the kindly Mrs. Begg had placed before him, he started for Askaig, the Laird promising to visit him next day and give him any news he might have obtained regarding the movements of Carrach.

Askaig was distant, by the shortest road, which lay across the fields, five miles from Clashgirn, and about the same from Cairnieford. Although it was already dark, and a snow-storm threatening, Falcon took the shortest way; if he had thought at all of the danger of being caught in the storm before he had crossed the intervening hills, he was in the humour rather to have welcomed the prospect than to have gone round by the road to avoid it.

The Laird was singularly nervous: that was evinced by the hasty way in which he bade Mrs. Begg to tell one of the men to saddle his pony, and by the trembling way in which he grasped his staff. He muffled himself up carefully, however, with the assistance of his housekeeper. She ventured to say that it was a "wild-like nicht," and could he "no put off gaun out till the morn;" but he bade her mind her own business in such an angry way that she did not speak another word until he had ridden down the road.



"Confound him," he muttered, giving the reins a jerk, "wha would ever hae thought o' him turning up again, least of a 'wi' siccan a purpose. There'll be a fine ado if it gets win,' but it maunna—it shallna. I'll hae to get him out o' the country as quick as possible, and while he's in't I'll hae to keep him frae getting friendly words either wi' the agent or Robin Gray. Deil tak' him, can he no mind his ain business like other honest folk?"

By the time this monologue was concluded he had reached the junction of the road which led to Cairnieford, and he heard ringing along the hard frosty ground the hoofs of a horse trotting towards him from the direction of the town. There was light enough for him to distinguish the form of objects at a few paces distance; and presently he descried the outlines of a man and horse.

"A sharp nicht," said the horseman, riding past.

The Laird started in his saddle and suddenly drew rein.

"Is that you, Cairnieford?" he cried, hastily turning round.  
"Haud on a minute, I want to speak wi' you."

He rode quietly up to the side of Cairnieford, who had stopped just as he had been about to turn up the glen road.

"You're late abroad, Laird. What was you gaun to say?"

McWhapple laid his hand on the farmer's brawny shoulder, and spoke in a tone of friendly compassion.

"I hae news for you, Cairnieford—news that I'm feared will no be ower and above welcome."

"I would be surprised if it was, coming frae you," was Gray's dry response, shaking off the Laird's hand.

"Man, I dinna ken what for ye hae sic an ill-will to me that ye canna speak a pleasant word, though I hae ay tried to be friendly wi' you in spite o' a' your thrawn ways."

"It's rather a cauld nicht to stand arguing that matter, Laird; sae tell's your news, and lets be jogging."

"Aweel, aweel, be as dour's ye like, ye winna anger me, for I'm satisfied that some day ye'll ken me for the friend I am."

"I'll be weel pleased when that day comes. But dinna forget that I hae ken'd ye, McWhapple, since ye were just a

about you. We're in trouble about them. I have  
had a long talk with him, but still don't get

"I know him well enough now to understand the Lord with the  
rest of us. I think he's the best of us who resigns  
himself to God. He can't see him take over high, or  
he's not fit to do it."

"I never heard of such a man like DeWitt," said  
Burke. "I suppose he's a good man & highly able to  
do his work, but I don't know if he's been given the  
right. You know, though, that no one can  
stand against the

"There's always the Devil standing against ye. For sure;  
and he's got you all in his power. For whites even  
as you is white, and the Devil's always there to help.  
You know, you're not so bad, but when you was bad, or  
a hard man,

"Then, you and I both will have to stand looking your  
heads up to the Devil."

"I'm glad to see you with me again, but, as we say, the  
Devil's got you all in his power. I hope to get you to  
leave the Devil's power, & I know the Master Jesus wanna  
free you as ye are now."

He bent close to Burke, & whispered the words with  
peculiar significance.

"The Devil is dead to me, and I am his," announced Gray  
boldly.

"Aye, but he has come back here, and he's been tryin'  
to catch you, and seen your goodness, and the Lord only knows  
what'll happen."

It was now so much what the Lord said as what he implied  
that startled Robin Gray, and set a suspenseful thrill through  
out his strong frame. That was the Lord's way. He never  
said anything direct, he did everything by implication.

"Happen?—what can happen?" he exclaimed wonderingly.

"Od, there's one saying; but it's an awkward business for  
you."

"I canna see that."

"Aweel, I hope ye'll never need to see't; but ye may count on me helping you in any way that I can."

"Thank you" (gathering the reins hastily). "I'm glad ye told me before I got hame, as it'll help me to prepare mysel'. But the sooner I'm there the better noo. Guid nicht."

"I hope it winna make so much difference to you as I misdoubt it will; but——"

Robin had galloped away out of hearing before the sentence was finished.

McWhapple turned his pony's head and continued his way to the village with an especially complacent smirk on his yellow visage.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### DOUBTS.

"Dear child, how could I wrong thy name?  
Thy form so fair and faultless stands,  
That, could ill tongues abuse thy fame,  
Thy beauty would make large amends."

—*Hamilton of Bangour.*

THERE was the murmur of the sea behind him, and the wild sweep of the wind up the glen pushing him forward, whilst the gaunt trees stretched out their bare trembling branches, moaning and forming ominous shadows across his path.

"Aye, the sooner I'm hame the better," he muttered as he galloped along the road; but the nearer he approached his own house the slower became the pace of his mare Jean, until at last she was permitted to walk.

In a vague way he was conscious of sea, and wind, and shadows—conscious that they were affecting him in a manner they had never done before. He had never on any former occasion fancied the moan of the sea so sad, the sough of the wind so eerie, or the shadows of the firs so gloomy. His character had been too sharply formed in the severe mould of practical life to permit him to know much of fancy, or to

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regard nature at any time by its light. That was why the effect of those strange voices of nature, which echo our passions of joy or sorrow according to the humour in which we hear them, seemed so peculiar to him now.

When the light shining in the window of the parlour—placed there by Jeanie's hand to guide him home—became visible, he brought his mare to a stand, much against the animal's will, for she sniffed the stables, and knowing that supper was so near, did not care to linger.

"Bide a wee, lass, bide a wee," said Robin gently, "let me think a minute and see gin I can look at the matter fair and straight afore I meet her. . . . Puir Jeanie, puir wife—I doubt, I doubt I hae done you and him wrang. But wha was to ken o' this? No me, onyway. . . . My head's a wee thing confused the nicht someway. Aiblins I took ower muckle drink, though I didna feel ony the waur o't till after I met Mc Whapple—confound his tongue; it seems to me as though it was made o' a gall-bladder that pooshins everything it touches."

He lifted his bonnet and passed his hand over his head abstractedly. His fingers touched the bald crown, and rested there.

"Aye, I'm an auld man," he muttered weariedly; "an' she's but a young lassie, and Jeamie's come hame. What's the upshot?—that she'll turn frae me to him?—for she lo'ed him dearly."

His whole body shook under the violent emotion of the thought. How cold and cheerless seemed the glen with the drizzling snow falling softly about him, and the wind soughing in melancholy time to the sharp rippling of the burn. His eyes wandered drearily till they rested on the light shining in the window.

It was beckoning him home, and it seemed to inspire hope and courage.

"Hoots, I'm just an auld goose," he exclaimed, gathering himself up, as it were, and shaking off the forebodings which rendered him miserable. "Jeamie's come hame—what about



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that? She's my guidwife, and she's promised to be a true ane. She's had time to ken how precious she is to me, and she winna desert me now. Fie on me to doubt her for a minute. We'll just make the puir chield welcome, and try to comfort him a' that we can. It's no his fault nor ours either that things are as they are. We'll just try to make the best o' them, and no make them waur by quarrelin' amang oursel's. Sae ye can bode as ye like, Laird McWhapple. We're nae gowks, and we ken that what's done canna be undone, and we'll just be content wi' things as they stand."

He was considerably relieved by this decision; and he made a bold effort to break through the gloom that had gathered about him. Jean was permitted to advance at a smart trot, and Robin leaped from the saddle when he reached the door with much of his usual cheeriness.

The door opened before he had time to knock, and Jeanie appeared with a light. The effect of her appearance was to dispel his moody misgivings so completely for the time being, that he did not at first notice how pale she was, or how her hands trembled as she unfastened his plaid.

But whilst he was taking his supper, and answering Adam's questions about the market, he observed that she was unusually silent. That led him in a stealthy way to examine her face, and he saw then how ill she was looking.

He made no comment, although his heart seemed suddenly to sink, and he felt the gloom returning in spite of the bright fire which shed a warm comfortable glow throughout the room. He went on eating and answering Adam's questions about the number of sheep and cattle in the market, and the prices they obtained, just as if there were nothing disturbing him.

He turned abruptly from the table to the fire. Why was it neither father nor daughter said anything about Falcon? He had been there—McWhapple had said so, and he could believe him to that extent, for he knew that Falcon would be eager to see her, and would no doubt seek her the moment he arrived.

Why then did they conceal the fact from him?

"My became shorter, and sometimes he  
forgot what the question had to be repeated.  
"I'm weary," said Adam at length. "sae we'll just  
lie down and syne I'll gang to bed."

He closed the chapter, as was his custom every night, and  
before he lay the Bible he bade them good night.

When the door closed on him, Robin cast a quick glance  
at his wife. She would surely tell him now. But no: she  
was making preparations for retiring without showing the  
slightest symptom of a disposition to refer to the matter which  
was uppermost in his thoughts and beginning to worry him  
already.

"I suppose there's been nobody here speiring for me the  
latter?" he said by-and-by, thinking that he would help her by  
giving her an opportunity to tell who had been there.

She had been crossing the room to a little basket in which  
she kept her knitting, and as he spoke she paused.

"No, there's been nobody speiring for ye," she answered  
lowly.

She took her knitting and seated herself by the fire opposite  
him. He looked steadily at the fire.

"Naebody ay a?"

"Naebody."

He was puzzled. Surely if Falcon had come to the house  
she would have said so now? Was it possible that Falcon,  
having learned that she was married, had been enraged and  
determined not to visit her? That was a hopeful thought: it  
would be so much better for them all that old memories should  
not be stirred to their depths as they would be by a meeting.

He looked at her again, and the hope was damped. Why  
was her expression so sad—so like what it had been the first  
time he had seen her after the false news came of Falcon's  
death—if she had neither seen nor heard of him?

"You're no looking sae weel as you were when I gaed awa'  
this morning," he said.

She felt his fond earnest eyes were on her, and her lip  
quivered slightly in spite of every effort she made to control

her countenance. Would she tell him why? No; not yet: wait till she was stronger, and could speak calmly of the event.

"I haena been very weel a' day," she responded quietly.

"What's been like the matter wi' ye?"

"Oh, naething particular, just a kind o' sickishness. Dinna fash yoursel' about it. I'll be weel again the morn."

"Ye maun get weel, guidwife" (fondly, and laying his hand softly on her head), "I canna do without ye, and I couldna live if I was to lose ye—hoots, what am I haverin' about; I canna lose ye—I maunna lose ye."

The great passion of the man shone in his eyes, and was heard in the exceeding tenderness of his voice. It troubled her; for somehow it called up Jeannie's sad face to her mind's eye, although she answered smiling—

"How should ye lose me, guidman? I'm no like to dee."

"Na, ye'll see me hame, I hope and expect—but, Jeanie lass, I'm a doitered auld body—"

"I'll no let ye say that," she interrupted, shaking her head at him, and trying hard to look happy and as if nothing troubled her; "ye're my guidman, and I'm no gaun to hao him misca'ed even by himsel'."

His visage glowed with pleasure.

"Aye, weel, guidwife, we'll let that flee stick to the wa'. But whiles I get notions o' things that might happen, but never will happen; and at thae times I like to hear ye saying ower and ower again that ye're happy, and that I do a' ye would like me to do or wish me to do to make ye sae."

She put down her knitting, rose, and placed her arms round his neck, resting her head on his shoulder.

"Ye hae done everything that a kind guid heart could do to make me and mine happy. Ye hae done mair nor ae man o' a thousand would hae done—far mair than I deserve—"

"Whist ye noo; ye're my guidwife, and I'll no hae her misca'ed," and he laughed loud and cheerily at this turn of her own words, forgetting the Laird, Falcon, and all.

"And while I live," she went on without changing her

position, "I'll ay try to prove to ye that I'm grateful, and that I gie ye a' my heart as far as I hae it to gie."

"And—and ye're no sorry?"

"For what?"

"That ye married me?"

The question stung her to the quick. How was she to answer? Was she sorry. She thought of all his goodness, all his devotion: she thought of how much more they were worthy than of any sacrifice she could make—and in spite of James Falcon, in spite of the sharp pain she was enduring at this moment on his account, she answered firmly, meeting his yearning gaze with unfaltering eyes—

"No, Robin, I'm no sorry, gin you be happy—I never will be sorry."

At that he kissed her.

"Eh, Jeanie, woman, but it makes me glad to hear ye say that; it gies me a kind o' satisfaction that naebody could understand, to ken that ye're content. That would be the darkest day o' my life, the day I should hear ye say ye wished ye had never been married."

"But ye shall never hear me say that."

She spoke truly according to her resolution—according to her belief—that he would never hear her express regret, or feel by any act of hers that she could regret, although all the time her heart was fluttering with the thought of the misery that might have been spared two people if she had not been a wife.

"Thank ye, lass, I hope no: ill as it might hae been to bear twa or three month syne, it would be waur noo, and every day that we're thegither makes the possibility o't the mair terrible. Folk say that marriage cools love; but that's no true wi' us, for ilka day makes ye the mair precious to me. Ayo, Jeanie, every day ye live ye grow dearer and dearer to me. I seem to hae got an extra liking for the house noo, jist because ye dwal in't; and I amaist love the ground just because ye walk on't. I wouldnna hae cared a button about leaving the farm afore we were married; but I couldna thole

to quit the place noo, just because I hae been so happy wi' you in't."

"Ye'll make me a vain wifie, gin ye gang on flatterin' me that gate, as though we were lad and lass."

"And so we are and will ay be; and it's no flattery ava, but just what I feel. Sae ye may be vain or no as ye like. Od, I forgot, and talking o' vanity minds me o't: I bought ye something the day."

With some labour he produced from the depths of a capacious pocket of his trousers a parcel, the paper covering of which he carefully removed, and displayed an enormous brooch.

"There," he exclaimed, fastening it on her breast and regarding it admiringly; "it's a bigger ane nor the banker's guidwife's. Ye'll look as grand as the best o' them at the kirk on Sabbath."

Instead of examining the present as she ought to have done, Jeanie placed her hands on her husband's head and looked in his face with a tearful smile on her own.

"Ay thinking o' me, Robin, wharever ye gang," she said tenderly.

"Troth, guidwife, it's even sae; morning, noon, and nicht I'm ay thinking o' ye, and wonnering what I can do to please ye. Is't no braw?"

"It's ower grand for me, I doubt."

"There's naething ower grand for ye that we can buy and pay for."

All his doubts and fears had for the present vanished; he had even forgotten the existence of Falcon. Nor did he think of him again until the noon of next day, when Adam, coming back from the shore, where he had been to look after his boat, told him that Clashgirn had passed him on the road.

The reference to the Laird recalled everything. But he could think of what he had heard on the previous night with indifference now.

"Did he speak?" queried Robin carelessly.

"Aye, he just said guid day, and speired how we were a' doing, and he said he was gaun ower the hills to Askaig."

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" He didna say onything mair ?"

" No a word."

" He didna mention Jeames Falcon ?"

" Na ; there was naething to bring the puir chield up atween us."

Robin moved away whistling. Evidently Adam knew nothing of the reported return of Falcon ; and surely he would have known of it if the lad had been at Cairnieford. Clearly the Laird had been mistaken in that part of his information, or, what was quite probable, had told a lie for the purpose of annoying him.

Was it not possible that the whole story was a lie, and that Falcon had not returned at all ? It was possible ; but then the Laird had never been caught in such a direct falsehood before ; and certainly there was something queer in Jeanie's expression.

He watched her—not because he doubted her in the least—but because he loved her, and every change of look or manner was of interest to him, that he might know the cause, and if possible remove it.

He discovered nothing, however, save that she seemed even more anxious than before, if that were possible, to serve him and please him ; and that at odd moments she would be abstracted with a shade on her face as of some troublesome thought. If he spoke to her at these moments she would start and eagerly attend to him as if desirous of removing any impression her manner might have made, and to avoid questioning. But she never made the least reference to Falcon.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

## PLAYING WITH FIRE.

"On peace and rest my mind was bent,  
And, fool I was, I married."—*Old Song*.

THINKING and thinking over all these circumstances, Robin became curious to know whether or not there was any truth in the Laird's information; and two days afterwards, when he happened to meet Girzie Todd on her road to the house, he questioned her.

Girzie seemed to be a little taken aback; at any rate she was slow to answer, and that was a rare occurrence with her. This was the reason. She had come to prepare Jeanie for the surprise of Falcon's return, but she had been an hour too late. She had, however, readily agreed to say nothing about the matter to Robin in the event of meeting him. Consequently, she was at a loss now to know how much she might reveal without betraying the arrangement she had made with Jeanie.

"Wha tauld ye o't?" she asked, instead of answering him.  
"Clashgirn."

"Aye, it's true" (she understood now).

"Hae ye seen the lad?" said Robin, somewhat uncharitably disappointed to discover that the Laird had spoken truly.

"I saw him the nicht he came back."

"I wonder he doesna come our length. I'm sure we'd be glad to see him."

"Aye, Cairnieford, sae ye might be, for it's easy to him that wins to forgi'e, but it's no sae easy to him that loses."

"True eneuch, Girzie. But I think if I was to hae a quiet chat wi' him he might be persuaded to bear nae ill-will onyway. Do ye ken whar he is?"

"He is someway about, but I couldna exactly say whar he may be the noo."

She had no very definite reason for giving this evasive answer. She knew very well that he was at Askaig, for Wattie, who

had taken a special fancy to Falcon since he had told him about the big ship and the guns, had almost for the first time in his life mustered courage to quit his mother, and had trudged over the hills alone to Askaig every day to gratify his curiosity by listening to Falcon's stories of the wonders he had seen. He was there now, for Falcon, solitary and miserable, was glad even of the poor natural's company and friendship, especially as Wattie's affection for Jeanie made him ready to speak of her often, and to tell all he knew of what had passed before and since her marriage.

It was a sort of consolation to the unhappy man to hear again and again of the circumstances which had placed an im-passable barrier between him and the woman he loved. He persuaded himself that the more he heard of them, the more clearly the fact of the inevitable separation was presented to him, and that he was thereby schooling himself to think calmly of the irrevocable.

Girzie had been at first doubtful about permitting Wattie to venture so far from her alone; but as she had seen that his pride in his own achievement was rapidly giving him a self-confidence he had never before possessed, she was well pleased to let him go, for she knew that some day—far distant she hoped for his sake—he would have to stand alone.

She was enabled to form a pretty correct notion of Falcon's condition from the gossip of her son, and in evading Robin's question the only idea she had was that a visit from him would not be favourably received by Falcon in his present humour, and that she would not be the means of stirring up more strife to add to Jeanie's distress.

"Better let sleeping dogs lie," she said as she moved on to the house.

There she obtained an opportunity of whispering to Jeanie that the guidman was aware of Falcon's return. The information rendered her nervous and excited. Robin noticed that and marvelled, whilst his doubts and fears sprung up again with new strength.

She watched him closely, expecting him to speak, and

perceived that he was observing her strangely. That increased her excitability, and in proportion his uneasiness grew. But neither touched upon the matter that was uppermost in their thoughts, each fearing to pain the other. The result was a general feeling of discomfort without any very distinct or palpable cause that might have been seized and grappled with.

The following day was Sabbath—cold, bleak, and windy, the ground carpeted with frost-crusted snow. The sense of depression was still upon them as they proceeded to the kirk, and filled them with vague forebodings of something about to happen.

During the sermon Robin saw the Laird glancing frequently toward him with curious eyes. As they rose at the end of the service the Laird made a movement with his hand ; it was very slight, but Robin thought that it was intended as a signal that he wanted to speak to him.

Little as he cared for McWhapple's conversation at ordinary times, he was eager to learn where Falcon was and what he was doing ; and so was quite ready to wait for the Laird. Out in the kirkyard as usual he lingered exchanging greetings with his neighbours, whilst Jeanie walked on with old Mrs. Dunbar.

The Laird joined him immediately, and taking him by the arm mysteriously led him apart from the others.

"The guidwife's no looking vera weel ?" he said compassionately, glancing over his shoulder at her standing by the gate with Mrs. Dunbar.

"No, she hasna been a'thegither richt this twa or three days ; but it's naething particular, just a bit cauld."

"Aye, aye, just that ; this twa or three days ; ye mean since Tuesday ?"

Robin quietly released his arm from the Laird's grasp and looked him steadily in the face.

"Since Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, it doesna matter which o' the days it was," he said calmly. "I'm no sae particular about thae things as ye are, McWhapple, because I canna see that it does a man ony guid—or a woman either for

that matter—to be ay looking for a storm in the face o' the sun."

"Just that, just that, I agree wi' ye; but he's a gowk that would put to sea in a punt when the clouds are darkening ower the sun."

"Maybe sae; but ye wanted to say something. Say it and let me awa'."

"Oh, I was merely gaun to mention that my puir frien' Falcon doesna seem just richt in the head since he saw your guidwife. I wanted him to gang awa' at once, but he's lingering about the place in spite o' my advice, for what end Heaven kens."

"Whar is he biding? No wi' you?" (controlling voice and features as well as he could that they might not show any of the emotion he felt).

"No, he wouldna bide wi' me; I wish he had, for then I maybe would hae had some command over him. But he would gang awa' whar there would be naebody to see him, or jalouse what he micht be about."

"Whar is he?" (doggedly).

"Up by at Askaig—ye ken he had ay a notion o' the place. I hae been up to see him twa or three times, but I can mak' naething o' him."

"I'll gang ower the morn and see what I can make o' him" (drily, and turning away).

"You" (detaining him); "mighty! no, ye maunna do that. Guid kens what would happen atween ye, for, puir lad, I'm feared his head's a wee thing touched."

And the Laird took a snuff, with violent nasal accompaniment expressive of grief.

"A' the mair reason that I should see him, and try to mend the wrang he thinks I hae done him."

"Mercy on us, man! ye'll just drive him wud a'thegither."

The Laird seemed to be really agitated for once in his life.

"We'll see."

"Ye maunna gang near him"—(following him).

"I'll be wi' him the first thing the morn's morning'.

"It'll be the death o' ane o' ye."

"It'll aiblins be life to him."

Under an exterior of calm resolution, Robin concealed his emotion from all, save the anxious eyes of his wife. She had seen him speaking to the Laird, and she would have instinctively divined the subject of their conversation, even if it had not been indicated by the sad and thoughtful expression of her husband's face, and the wistful glances with which he regarded her.

Sad he was; for the Laird's description of Falcon's condition, although not intended to produce that effect, impressed him with the idea that he had unintentionally done an irreparable wrong, and he was anxious to make what recompense might be in his power.

Yet he did not speak of the matter to Jeanie; but he purposed doing so for all their sakes immediately after having seen Falcon, when he should be able to relieve her mind of any distress on his account by giving her the result of their interview.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### ASKAIG.

"Come, winter, with thine angry howl,  
And raging, bend the naked tree;  
Thy gloom will soothe my cheerless soul,  
When nature all is sad like me."—*Burns*.

In the dull grey light of the succeeding morning Robin was riding on his way to Askaig. He was obliged to ride at a leisurely pace, for the ground was slippery, glistening under a hard frost. As the road was all up-hill, it became the more difficult for Jean, surefooted cannie brute as she was, to proceed steadily.

The pace fretted the rider's temper; for he was impatient to reach his destination; and at every stumble of the mare he

jerked the bit in a fashion to which Jean's mouth was wholly unaccustomed, uttering angry ejaculations at the same time.

He had left home without the least hint to any one as to whither he was going. He had merely said to Jeanie that he expected to be home in time for dinner. As it was the first occasion on which he had omitted to tell all about the object of his going forth, and as she was quickened to a perception of the least variation in his manner, she noticed the omission, and wondered at it uneasily.

It was a bleak journey through the mist; with hills and dales lying in their white silent shroud, and the trees which here and there belted the road, or hung over the brow of a glen, rising like gaunt ghosts of themselves. The only sounds he heard were those of the wind sweeping along in keen biting blasts, and the muttering of the burn, which, swollen by the snow, rolled black and noisily down the glens. A few cots of farm-workers lying so low by the roadside that under the snow they were scarcely distinguishable as anything more than a hillock until he was close to them, and a farm-steading lying a quarter of a mile off the road, were the only habitations between Cairnieford and Askraig.

The road followed the devious course of the burn, generally in sight of it, sometimes rounding a hill and losing it, but always returning to the black line.

Half a mile of the road was a species of broad ledge, having been cut on the hip of a high mountain, the shoulders and head of which towered above the traveller on one side, whilst on the other there was a steep slope down to the bed of the stream. Only sheep and the shepherds' dogs could obtain footing on this slope.

Again the road suddenly dipped down to the burn, which it became necessary to ford to continue the journey. This was a simple affair on ordinary occasions, foot-passengers crossing easily on three large stepping-stones, whilst a horse would scarcely have been wet above the knees. But when rain had fallen in any quantity, the burn rose to the proportions of a turbulent river; the water dashed down from the hills with

the violence of a cataract, seeming to gather strength and volume at the ford, rendering it frequently impassable for several days to man or beast. Repeatedly sheep and cattle which had missed their footing had been swept away by the force of the current as if they had been straws.

The power of the spate was attested by the form of the hill on the side to which Robin was journeying. From the edge of the burn it rose curving inward in the shape of a bow—the whole side of the hill having been undermined and washed away. This was known as the Brownie's Bite, from the supposed resemblance to the impression that would have been left if some monster's jaws had closed upon the scarp of the hill and bitten it out.

On the height above there was a considerable extent of table-land, which formed the chief arable ground of the farm of Askaig. The steading itself overlooked the abyss; standing within fifty yards of the brink. It was a small squat house, with rough stone walls of a slate colour and thatched roof. It contained three apartments, a kitchen, a sitting-room, and a small bedroom. There was a garret which was reached by a ladder through a trap in the ceiling of the kitchen, but it was only used for storing bags, boxes, and lumber of any sort. The byre, stable, and pig-sty formed one long wooden erection, painted with tar, whilst a similar erection opposite served as a barn and cart-shed. The out-buildings stood close to the house, and on the side furthest from the lip of the Brownie's Bite.

Although the burn was swollen when Cairnieford reached it, he had no difficulty in crossing. The road then made a half circle round the hill, ascending to the steading. At the best, Askaig was a cold solitary-looking place, perched on its eyrie above the deep gully surrounded by the solemn quietude of the hills. But under present circumstances it seemed especially dreary. The dull monotony of the snow lay upon everything, and the hills looked down on it with frowning heads of mist. No smoke ascended from the chimneys, to indicate that the house was habited. The barn-yard was

vacant of the yellow stacks of grain which reflect warmth, and colour, and sense of plenty on a farmer's home. Portions of the outbuildings had fallen into disrepair; and an old plough, a broken harrow, and a cart-wheel, strewn about with various other disabled implements partially buried in the snow, imparted an aspect of desolation and ruin to the place.

Since Falcon's departure the buildings had been left to take care of themselves. Formerly he had kept them in neat repair, looking forward to the day when he should be able to bring Jeanie there to make a happy home. But the laird had been too eager to make the most of the land to pay any heed to the steading. The man who had charge of the place, and now lived in the house, had only been installed within a few weeks, and had not yet had time to repair the damage neglect had wrought during the previous year.

"Weel, he's made choice o' a lonely eneuch place to hide himsel' in," thought Robin as he approached the house, and observed with all the dissatisfaction of an energetic man the dilapidated state of affairs. "I wonder the Laird doesna let the farm. He'd make mair o't nor he's like to do if things gang on this gate. Aye, aye, and puir Jeanie thought that this was to be his hame and hers. It looks just like himsel' —wrecked and ruined."

He gazed wistfully about him as if he had some share in the wreck; and then setting his teeth firmly—

"But, wi' Heaven's help we'll mend matters yet; and when he's working hard and prospering he'll forget his disappointment. He's no the first by mony a'ane that's had to get ower the same fash, and has done well tae. I'm mistaken in the chiel' if he hasna common sense eneuch to help himsel' when he sees that there's nae other way for't."

Before he had reached the door it was flung open, and the man in charge appeared. Cairnieford knew him—Rob Keith or Lang Rob, as he was called, and who, having won the gartens at the marriage of Robin Gray, had proved his worthiness of the victory by taking a wife to himself within two months after.

Lang Rob's mouth was at this moment full of bannock, for he had been breakfasting on bannock and milk when he had observed from the window the unexpected visitor, and had rushed out to welcome him.

"Guid mornin' to ye, Cairnieford," he cried heartily, although somewhat indistinctly; and then gulping down the mouthful, "wha in a' the world would hae expected to see ye here. Losh, it does ane's e'en guid to see a human cratur' in this out-o'-the-way quarter, for there's naething but dumb beasts to speak till morn tae nicht, and ye may guess that's no the maist pleasing conversation, seeing that it's a' on ae side; and naething in't to warm ye, barrin' ye get a chance o' damnin' ane o' the stupid brutes for tum'lin' ower a crag."

"Ye hae your guidwife, Rob," said Cairnieford, dismounting and securing the rein to the iron ring by the lintel of the door.

"Oo, aye, whan she's at hame; but she gaed awa doon to her folk at the Port on Sabbath and she'll no be hame afore Wansday or Thursday, and there's no a spoonfu' o' het porridge till she comes back, for I canna be fashed making't mysel'. Hoo's a' your folk doon by?"

"A' weel, thank ye; but you're no your lane, are ye? I thought Jeames Falcon was wi' ye?"

"Oo, aye, he's bidin' here the noo, but ane nicht as weel hae the wooden Hielander frae the snuff shop at the Port for a' the company he is. I dinna think he's spoken sax words to me since he cam'."

"When was that?"

"Wansday nicht last when the snow began. Daft Wattie Todd's been up wi' him every day since syne, and the twa gang daunerig about, or sitting ben the house there i' the cauld, just as though they were baith crack; an deed I dinna ken but Wattie's the mair sensible o' the twa, for ane can get a friendly word out o' him whiles, if ye just speak kindly to him an' treat him like ither folk; but ye canna get mair nor aye or no frae Falcon, try as ye will. He's no like himsel' ava, for he used to be a blithe eneuch chiel'."

All this was confirmation of McWhapple's statements; and if he had been truthful in this respect, was it not probable that he had also been truthful in telling him that Falcon had been at Cairnieford? Yet Jeanie had said nothing of his visit!

"Is he ben the house enoo?"

"Him? Did ye want to see him?"

Lang Rob had made no reference to the cause to which he attributed the change in Falcon; but he had been thinking of it for all that, and thinking too that there would likely be a fine toulzie between Jeanie's guidman and Jeanie's lad if they happened to meet. Therefore, he was astonished by Robin's question, and still more by the answer to his own.

"That was what I came here for. Is he in?"

"Na, he gaed out this morning before daylight. I heard him openin' the door, and thocht he'd be back afore breakfast time onyway, but he's never come yet that I ken o', but I'll look to make sure."

He turned into the house, and Robin followed him. They entered the parlour—the apartment which Falcon occupied. It had even a more cheerless aspect than the exterior of the house. The floor and walls were bare and damp-looking. Lang Rob and his wife only used the kitchen even when they had the house to themselves. The ashes of a fire lay on the hearth, but there was no warmth in them now, and they seemed almost to make the room look colder by suggesting the fire which ought to have been there in that season to give any comfort to the occupant.

As for furniture there was nothing but three wooden chairs, a table, and the bed made in a recess in the wall with a door like a cupboard. The bed-clothes were lying tossed in a heap as they had been left when Falcon had risen.

"He's no here, onyway," said Lang Rob, crossing the room his head almost touching the low ceiling.

He looked into the little chamber, the door of which stood at the opposite side of the parlour.

"And he's no there."

Robin glanced into the apartment ; it was empty, and had evidently not been used for some time.

"When is he likely to come back?" he asked, standing in the centre of the cheerless parlour gazing thoughtfully round him.

"Guid kens. Whiles he gangs out in the mornin' an' doesna come back till after dark, and whiles he's back afore ye would think he had time to rin round the steadin'. Will ye bide a wee an' see if he comes?"

"Aye, I may as weel, noo that I'm here."

"Come awa, then, an' I'll let ye see the cattle. We hae gotten twa or three rale braw stots."

Whereupon they proceeded to the byre, Lang Rob forgetting all about his lodger's circumstances and oddities, in his interest in the cattle under his charge, and glib commendation of their various good qualities. His tongue rattled on unceasingly, as if he were eager to make the most of the rare opportunity of an appreciative listener.

Cairnieford had waited two hours, as the dial of his big silver watch, which he had pulled up from the depths of his fob, informed him, and still Falcon had not appeared.

"He's maybe down at Clashgirn," he said then.

"He might be. The Laird's been up twa'r three times to see him, and aiblins he's gaen doon there the day, no to haud the Laird ay travellin' back and fore."

"I'll gang and see, onyway. But if I shouldna find him, tell him frae me that I'll be up on Wednesday mornin', and that I maun see him."

"I'll tell him."

"I'd come up the morn again," Cairnieford proceeded as he mounted Jean ; "but I hae to gang to the market, and as I hae baith to lift and pay some siller, I canna just put it aff."

"Ye'll aiblins see my guidwife when ye're in the toon the morn ; and if ye do, just tell her to come awa' hame directly, for I canna manage without her ; and if she doesna come—od, I think I'll loup ower the Brownie's Bite to spite her."

"I'm thinking there wouldna be mony hale banes in your body by the time ye wan to the foot. But I'll tell your guid-wife."

Lang Rob accompanied him as far as the ford, and there he looked anxiously up and down the glen at the swollen burn.

"'Deed, if she doesna come hame the morn, she'll no be able to win ower for a week. It looks like rain, and if it comes a sudden doon-pour wi' a' that snaw lying on the hills, there'll be sic a spate as hasna been for a while."

Robin rode away disappointed and thoughtful. His impatience was subdued by a sense of depression which he could not overcome, and which he could only attribute to his sorrow on Falcon's account. The more he heard of him the more anxious he became to amend so far as he might the wrong he had unwittingly done him.

At Clashgirn he learned that the Laird had been out since breakfast time, and had left word that he would not be home till late if he returned at all that night, which was doubtful, as he was going to Ayr.

"Has Falcon been here?" he asked.

"Na; he hasna been ance here since Wednesday last, though he kens hoo I would like to see him and hear a' about his travels," answered Mrs. Begg.

Robin was disappointed again, but he had nothing for it save to turn homeward. He wondered if McWhapple had taken Falcon away purposely to prevent their meeting.

"The auld fule," he muttered angrily, "as if he thought I couldna keep my temper. Maybe, though, it's no me he's feared for. Toots, Jeames Falcon canna be sae spited against me that he winna listen to reason. I'll no believe that till I see him mysel'."

The rain had begun by the time he started for the market next morning. It was only a light drifting shower; but the clouds were loaded and black, and Adam predicted a heavy fall.

The prediction was fulfilled by the afternoon; for when Robin quitted the town on his way home, the rain was falling

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in a thick heavy shower, and the earth was rapidly blackening under the dissolving snow. It was a steady pour, and when Robin reached home the burn was roaring down the glen, swollen to a torrent, and rising to within a few yards of the steading.

He was drenched to the skin when he dismounted at the door, and gave Jean to the lad who appeared from the kitchen, to lead her to the stable.

He entered the house, calling to Jeanie to get him a change of clothes, and wondering indeed that she had not as usual met him at the door. The lamp was already lit in the room, but there was nobody to meet him except Adam, who regarded him with amaze.

"Jeanie?" he said. "She's out."

"Send some o' them to tell her I'm come hame, then. She can leave the kye to the lassie."

"But she's no at the byre," said Adam, opening his eyes; "she gaed out three hours syne or mair, and I unnerstood she was gaun to meet you."

"To meet me? What for?"

"She said there was a message come that ye had gotten yoursel' hurt, and that she was to gang to ye at ance, and maybe wouldna be hame the nicht. She was in an unco state about it, and just took a bundle o' things that she thocht she would need, and gaed awa' wi' the chiel' that brought the news."

"Wha could tell that lee? Gaed awa'—whar to?"

"We were a' sae muckle confused that she forgot to say, and I forgot to speir, for she wasna twa minutes in getting ready."

Robin summoned every man and woman about the place, and questioned them excitedly. But none of them could give any information as to whither their mistress had gone, or who had been the messenger who had come for her. One of the women, however, had noticed that "she was greeting, and looked sair frichted."

That was all he could learn, for the messenger had arrived during the dinner-hour, when the folks were all in-doors.

"Whar's the loon?" cried Robin, looking about.

The "loon" was the boy who had taken Jean to the stable, and who opportunely returned as his master asked for him.

The question was put to him—had he seen his mistress going away?

"Aye, I was ower by the plantin' for the wood that was cut yesterday, and I saw her gaeing awa' in a gig wi' a man. The gig was waiting at the foot of the road, an' the man asked me to hand the horse, and gied me a penny."

"Gig? What gig?"

"I dinna ken, but I think it was the Clashgirn gig."

"Clashgirn!"

Robin's hand went up to his head to try and steady himself to think. Clashgirn's gig! Was it some trick that was being played upon him? Was McWhapple trying to ruin him? He had spite enough for that, notwithstanding all his professions of friendship. But no, no, what could he want with Jeanie?

"What way did the gig gang?" he demanded hoarsely.

"It gaed up by the hill road," answered the boy.

The hill road—Askaig—James Falcon—flashed through the husband's mind with the fiery swiftness of lightning, burning and maddening him.

"Saddle Brown Jock," he shouted, whilst men and women, unable to divine the cause of his excitement, stared at him with open eyes and mouths.

"Brown Jock!" ejaculated the cattleman; "he hasna been out this twa days, an' he's as wild as a stallion. There's no ane o' us daur gang near him wi' a bridle, let alone a saddle. Ye canna mean him."

"I say Brown Jock—daumn ye, do ye no hear what I say?"

But without waiting for answer or giving any of them time to obey, he rushed furiously from the house himself and down to the stable.

"He's gaen gyte," exclaimed the cattleman, who acted as Robin's grieve; "the horse 'll fell him if he touches him. After him, lads, and stop him."

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The men ran down to the stable ; but to their amazement they found the master busy buckling the girths round Brown Jock, the saddle already on the animal's back.

Without a word to any of them, but with frenzied haste he completed the fastening of the saddle, and with singular adroitness slipped the bridle over the horse's head and the bit into his mouth, drawing the snaffle tight.

Brown Jock was a powerful horse, with great fierce eyes and restive ears that betokened an unmanageable spirit. The moment he was led outside the stable he began to caper furiously, splashing the slush that was lying in pools on the ground about the onlookers.

"For guidsake, master, mind what ye're about," cried the grieve, alarmed.

Setting his teeth hard and gripping the reins short, Robin flung himself on the saddle.

The horse, startled by the sudden weight that pressed upon him, gave one furious bound forward that almost unseated the rider, and then dashed off at a mad pace down the road, followed by shouts of alarm from the wondering men.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### THE WIFE'S TRIAL.

"The night came on with heavy rain,  
Loud, fierce, and wild the tempest blew ;  
In mountains roll'd the awful main—  
Ah, hapless maid ! my fears how true!"—*Tannahill.*

By the time Brown Jock reached the main road, Robin had seated himself firmly, and with one vigorous tug at the right rein he turned the horse's head toward the hills. Then he let him have his way. He could not go too furiously for his rider.

It had often been Robin's boast, that if a horse would keep his feet, he would keep his back. That it had been no vain

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boast was proved now; for Brown Jock tried all his tricks to unseat his rider; but in the main he held straight onward up the hill at a furious gallop, and that was all Robin cared for.

Wind and rain beat upon him, and the torrent rushed thundering down the glen.

But neither wind nor rain could cool the fever of his brain; and not all the thunder of the torrent could deaden the sound of the demon voices that were ringing and shrieking in his ear —“Askaig, James Falcon.”

The legend of the kelpie was verified to him this night, and the eerie voice rose above the fury of the spate, wailing the words—“Askaig, James Falcon.”

Brown Jock stretched to the road with glaring eyes that seemed to pierce the deepening darkness. Down from the hills rushed countless streamlets, into which the snow had thawed, and down poured the rain steadily,—all swelling the torrent in the glen. The hills rose like broad towers of gloom, and the black clouds hung heavily overhead as if ready to fall and crush horse and rider to the earth.

He was insensible to everything save that eerie voice always shrieking in his ears and goading him to desperation; and the horse sped recklessly up steep and down slope as if inspired with something of its rider’s frenzy.

As they attained the highest point of the road where it suddenly dipped down to the ford, the rider glanced across the black chasm and on the opposite height observed a feeble light in the window of Askaig. At the same moment a vivid flash of lightning pierced the black clouds and illumined the hill tops, followed instantly by a deafening peal of thunder that shook the earth and echoed again along the hills.

The horse came to a dead stand, sinking back on its haunches and quivering with fright. Robin struck it with his heels, and the animal suddenly dashed down the steep with new fury and into the torrent.

The impetus received in descending the hill carried the horse half way through the water; but there the current was

strongest and fiercest. The water reached the saddle, and coming with full force against the horse's side, whirled it round and swept it down the stream. But Brown Jock was a powerful horse, and obtained additional strength from terror. It regained footing with its head to the current, and then with a huge effort of all its strength cleared the water and ascended the road at a gallop, never slackening pace until the rider drew rein at the door of the house.

The din of the storm had prevented his approach being heard by the inmates. He flung himself from the saddle, slipped the rein through the iron ring beside the door, and entered without knocking. The passage was dark, but a gleam of light shone from beneath the door of Falcon's room. It was no time for ceremony of any kind, even if his passion had permitted him to think of it. He flung open the door and made two paces into the apartment.

Then he halted, for there was an exclamation of amaze and alarm at his appearance. He stood still, the water dripping from his soaked garments and forming a pool around him.

He glowered darkly upon his wife, too full of passion, too much overwhelmed by the conviction of the truth of his worst suspicions, to be capable of speech at first.

The room was lit by the red glow of the peat fire by which Wattie Todd was crouching, dividing his attention equally between gazing in puzzled wonder at the other occupants of the room and feeding the fire with peat.

On a chair nearly opposite the door Jeanie was sitting, her eyes red and swollen with weeping. When her husband entered she had started with a sharp cry and moved forward as if about to rush to him: but when she saw the black fury of his face she had paused, frightened.

James Falcon was standing by the table, on which lay the bundle Jeanie had brought. He was flushed with excitement, apparently having been pacing the floor when he had halted abruptly with an exclamation of astonishment at the entrance of Robin Gray.

The latter for several minutes paid no heed to any one ex-

cept his wife, and upon her he glowered dumbly, whilst his giant form shook with passion. Then his eyes slowly turned from her to Falcon, and his hands closed spasmodically as if he were about to strike him.

A spell seemed to have fallen on them all, whilst the storm raged without, and the wind rushed angrily in at the open doors, shaking them till the hinges creaked again.

It was Jeanie who broke the spell of that grim silence. Starting up she rushed to her husband with extended arms.

"Robin, Robin, I'm glad ye hae come," she cried, attempting to seize his hands.

But he stepped back, snatching his hands from her wrathfully.

"Awa', woman, awa'," he said hoarsely; "dinna come near me lest I fail to keep my hands still and do ye some hurt."

"What would you seek to hurt me for? Hae ye no come to take me hame."

"Hame! What hame?" he exclaimed furiously; "I hae nae hame noo, and Lord kens where ye will find one. The hame that I made for ye, and that ye made bright wi' your hypocritical smiles and leeing tongue, ye hae torn it doon and trampled it aneath your feet. Hoo can there be a hame where there is nae truth? Hoo can there be a hame where there is a fause wife? Every stick and stane o' Cairnieford would rise to scorn ye, if ye dare gang back there. Oh, woman, the house is black wi' your shame; and I'm a broken auld man that can never lift my head again."

The latter words were uttered in a tone choking and quavering with agony, that seemed to be bursting his heart.

"My shame?" she echoed, her bosom heaving, her colour coming and going rapidly, whilst her clear eyes rested on him with unspeakable pity and love.

"Aye, your shame. What, would ye brazen it out in spite o' the evidence o' my ain e'en? My God! can ane sae guilty be sae bauld? Turn awa' your face frae mine. Gae, hide your head for shame, and never look on me again lest I strike ye dead at my feet."

"Dae it noo if ye think I deserve it," she answered with steady voice, and never flinching before his angry gaze, although the hot blood tingled on cheeks and brow. "But I hae nae cause for shame, and I winna hide my head though a' the world was looking on me."

There was a brave truth in her simple indignation; but to him in his blind passion it was only brazen falsehood. He stared at her as if appalled by the boldness of her guilt.

"Ye hae nae cause for shame? griping her arm violently, and bending over her with darkening visage and quivering lips. Was it no you that swore to be a true wife to me?"

"Aye, and so I hae been" (firmly).

"And hae ye no hidden frae me that this man had come hame—that he was wi' ye as soon as he arrived; and hae ye no told me lees about yoursel', and hae ye no this day travelled through wind and rain that ye might run awa' wi' him? Hae ye no done a' that, and will ye dare to say there is nae cause for shame?"

"I didna tell ye I had seen him, because I didna want to vex ye; but I meant to tell ye o't. I came here the day seeking you, no him—"

"Hae done, woman, hae done," he interrupted sternly, wrath and agony struggling for mastery; at one instant rage in every look and tone; and the next the torture he was enduring declaring itself in the faltering voice and the spasms of pain which distorted his features. "I came only to satisfy mysel' that ye were here—that ye were the fause thing ye are, but no to bide and add to your sin by wringing new falsehoods frae ye. I hae seen and I am satisfied. I leave ye to take the gate ye hae chosen; and the best that I can do for ye is to try to think o' ye as ane that is dead—for dead ye are to a' that is guid in life. I'll try to think o' ye as what I thought ye were, no what ye hae proved yoursel' to be. The best wish that I can gie ye is that ye mayna be haunted by the memory o' the wreck ye hae made o' me—may ye never ken the misery ye hae gien me. God forgie ye, Jeanie, for it a'."

"And God forgie you, Robin Gray, for the wrang ye do me."

"Peace, woman, and dinna take His name in vain. Frae this minute ye are free to gang where ye will, to do what ye will, for I haud ye worthless o' an honest man's care. The shame, the misery ye hae cast upon me I will try to bear and hide frae the world as best I may ; but dinna come near me again ; dinna let me hear ye blaspheme."

"In His name I ask ye to listen to me," she began firmly ; but as he made a step to the door, as the thought flashed upon her that this separation was to be final as he declared—that she was never to cross his path again save as a stranger—that, worst of all, and most probable in his present distracted state, he might be driven to do himself some injury—all her indignation, and the strength it gave her, broke down, and she burst into tears, stretching out imploring hands toward him. "Oh, Robin, Robin, I hae been a true wife to ye in thought and deed, though my heart was sairly tried. Day and nicht I hae striven to make ye happy ; day and nicht I hae prayed for strength to be a' that a wife should be to ye, and after a' that, oh, man, man, will ye cast me aff in your blind fury without hearin' me ? Will ye leave me to gang wi' a broken heart and a bowed head among folk because ye are wud wi' jealousy. The Lord help me, I wish that ye had never been guidman to me ; I wish that I had never won to this place, for I would rather hae been drooned in the water out by than hae heard the cruel fause words ye hae spoken this night."

"And I would rather hae found ye cauld and dead in the burn than hae found ye here with him."

"It was nae faut o' mine that I was here—will ye no believe a word I say ?"

"No, after what I hae seen. I hae done wi' you for ever."

He wheeled round to quit the room, but Falcon planted himself between him and the door.

"But ye are no done wi' me, Cairnieford. I hae listened wi' puir patience to the mad nonsense ye hae been talking, to the foul shame ye hae been casting on the best and truest wife

man ever had—you that should haе been the first to rax out your arms and shield her. Ye would fling her frae ye without gieing her a chance o' clearing hersel' because she's ower muckle broken doon by the disgrace you bring to her to compel ye to hear her. But ye shall not so easily escape from me."

Robin, during this address, which was delivered in a tone of indignation and resolution, stood like an angry lion at bay. His hands worked violently and his lips trembled, as if it cost him a huge effort to restrain himself from falling upon the speaker and tearing him piecemeal. The actual physical suffering of the man was terrible.

"Out o' my gate, Jeames Falcon," he said huskily; "out o' my gate, or I canna answer for what may happen."

"I can, however" (coolly, almost contemptuously).

"I warn ye, stand awa' frae the door, or your bluid will be on my hands. I leave the woman to ye—take her; she's worthy o' sic an honest gentleman. You and her baith I hae tried to serve, and baith hae turned and stabbed me."

"You're a fool, and a mad one, too. By heaven, I would give my life if she would let me take her at your word, and prove to her—"

"Daunn ye, if ye will hae't, blame yourself!"

Unable to control his passion longer, Robin grasped Falcon by the throat, and, as easily as if he had been a doll, lifted him up and dashed him on the floor. Too frenzied apparently to know what he was doing, he knelt on the prostrate man's breast, still keeping that deadly grasp on his throat.

Jeanie, with a cry of terror, flung her arms round her husband, and with an exertion of desperate strength drew him from his victim. Her very touch seemed to have a magic influence on him, and with a wild dismayed look he regained his feet as soon as Falcon.

Seeing Lang Rob standing in the doorway staring with blank amaze at the extraordinary scene, Robin shouted to him—

"Haud him aff—keep him awa', or I'll be the death o' him."

He was rushing out when Jeanie griped his arm.

"I will go wi' ye," she said; "in storm or calm, I'll gae wi' ye."

"Awa—ye hae saved him" (confused by his excitement and despair), "gaae to him."

"And I hae saved you frae the gallows, maybe."

"Awa—keep him out o' my sicht—ye hae saved him—ye hae ruined me—Heaven keep ye—oh, deevil burn ye for ever!"

And, grating his teeth furiously, he flung her from him with such violence that she fell to the floor stunned, whilst he rushed madly forth to the darkness and the storm. Wind and rain were raging wilder than ever, but he welcomed them as friends; for they were in keeping with the storm in his own breast.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### UTTERLY DARK.

"Oh the warl' to me is a bleak dreary waste,  
Without a green spot where a fond hope might rest;  
An' I stan' 'mid the gloom like a shelterless tree,  
Sair scathed wi' the blast, reft my blossoms frae me."

—James Leman.

LANG ROB, dripping wet, and shivering with cold, had been sufficiently startled by what he had seen to yield prompt obedience to Robin Gray's command. He had jumped aside to let him pass, and had seized Falcon roughly by the arms to prevent him following.

There was a sharp struggle between them, for although he had no intention to fight with Cairnieford, and was determined that nothing should force him to do so, he was at the same time determined that he should listen to a full explanation of the circumstances under which he had found Jeanie at Askaig.

"He's wud, do you no see? Let him gang, or there'll be murder atween ye," cried Lang Rob.

"Let go, I tell you," shouted Falcon, and wrested himself from his grip.

But it was just then that Jeanie fell, and Falcon seeing

that, instead of following Robin, sprung to her side and lifted her in his arms.

"Oh the daft blind idiot," he cried bitterly; "let him gang, and may the black heart o' him that could think the thoughts he has spoken o' her make a hell to him. He's nae mair worthy o' her than the carrion crow is worthy o' the white-breasted doo for a mate. Let him gang. I for a'ne will never attempt to gie him peace by showing him how pure she is. Get me some water."

The moment he had seen Falcon attacked, Wattie had bounded to his feet as if about to spring to his assistance. The rapidity with which the struggle passed, however, had given him no opportunity to display the courage which affection for his friend had inspired. But he now showed his readiness to serve him, and, with an alacrity for which he would not previously have obtained credit, he snatched up a blazing peat and ran into the kitchen, returning presently with a coggieful of water.

"I told ye hoo it would be as soon's I saw her here," said Lang Rob sympathetically, assisting Falcon in his efforts to restore Jeanie, by chafing one of her hands, "I wish to guidness I'd been in when he cam'. I micht hae kept him frae seeing her. But that confounded stot has kept me dancing after him like a Will-o'wisp in a' the storm for the last twa hours, and I haena got him yet—deil's in the brute, I expect he's tum'let ower the Bite, and being carried awa wi' the spate. There'll be a fine ado when the Laird hears o't, though I hae done what man could do in sic a storm. She's coming tae, puir body."

Falcon, paying no attention to Lang Rob's lamentation, had been busy sprinkling the water on Jeanie's face, whilst Wattie stood silently beside him holding the coggie and watching anxiously.

With a big sigh Jeanie's eyes opened slowly. At first she did not understand the position, and she looked with pitiable vacancy at the men who were bending over her, seeing Falcon last.

"Are ye better now, Jeanie?" he asked tenderly.

His voice seemed to touch some chord of memory, and instantly she was sensible of all that had occurred to the minutest detail. With a low moan, and shuddering, she covered her face with her hands as if she could not bear to meet the gaze even of Daft Wattie Todd and Lang Rob.

"Dinna distress yoursel', Jeanie, dinna heed for a man that could cast ye aff as lightly as an old coat. Ye were ower guid for him, and a' body whose respect ye need care for will say that."

As he spoke she became sensible that she was lying in his arms, and the knowledge quickened her strength. She started up, shrinking away from him as if there had been something evil in his touch.

"Where is he?" she asked bewilderedly, addressing Lang Rob.

"Cairnieford?" he answered, understanding at once to whom her question applied. "He gaed awa twa or three minutes syne, when ye fell."

She moved to the door, but she was so weak that she tottered unsteadily.

"Mercy on us, mistress, whar are ye gaun?" cried Lang Rob, stepping between her and the door.

"After my guidman" (the voice was husky and broken by suppressed sobs).

"In this storm, wi' the nicht dark as pitch, and the rain pouring sae that ye canna see twa staps afore your nose? My certes, ye's no gang out o' this house the nicht wi' my will. When ane o' our stots that ought to ken the place has been lost and mair nor likely killed, I would like to ken how ye would find your road? It's clean impossible, and I'm no gaun to hae your death on my shouthers as weel's the stot's—there'll be steer enuch about that."

"I maun gae, or' ye maun bring him back to me," she answered feebly. "I'll no bide here without him."

"Bring him back—could ye bring a drop o' rain back out o' the spate? It's impossible, I tell ye; sae just content your-

sel' till the morning. Ye can lie doon in my guidwife's bed—”

“Let me gae awa,” she cried piteously, disturbed by a new source of terror; “he was angry and mad, and maybe he'll be drooned.”

“Deed, I wouldna say, though I hope no; and if ye'll be quiet, I'll gang out and look round for him; but there's nae use losing mair lives nor we can help—and there's the stot gane already for certain, the stupid brute. Will ye bide here till I come back?”

Falcon, when she had started from his arms regarded her sadly: sorrow for her misery subdued his own pain, and rendered him generous even when she hurt him most. He had not interfered when she made known her intention to follow her husband, although he was perfectly aware of the utter futility and danger of such an attempt, especially to one so weakened as she was by the agitation through which she had passed. He feared that if he endeavoured to stay her, it might only strengthen her resolution to go.

Now, however, he advanced to her, and taking her hand respectfully, but firmly, and in spite of her shrinking effort to release herself, he drew her toward a chair.

“You shall not quit the house until morning,” he said quietly, “if I have strength to keep you here. You shall not risk your life to follow a mad fool like him.”

“Ye are speaking o' my guidman,” she said, wiping her eyes, and looking at him angrily, “and gin ye hae half the respect for me ye pretend to hae, ye will not speak ill o' him behind his back in my hearing.”

“I'll no speak o' him ava, if you will try to calm yoursel' and remain here. I'll show ye that the respect I bear ye is nae pretence, for, hate him and scorn him as I do, I'll go mysel' and seek him.”

“Hoots na, ye maunna do that,” broke in Lang Rob, “I am acquaint wi' the bearings o' the place as weel as ye can be, and if he'll come ava, he'll come for me. He'd be mair like to gang the farer awa' if he was to hear ye. Sae I'll jist rin out

and gie a halloo, though I dinna see that it'll do muckle guid."

"No, no, dinna ye gang, or let me gang wi' ye," cried Jeanie, excitedly, and apparently afraid to be left with Falcon.

But Lang Rob, muttering to himself that "women folk were as thrawn as stots ony day," went out, closing the door after him with a vigorous slam, as if he did not altogether relish the task he had undertaken, and presently his voice was faintly heard above the din of the elements as he hallooed with all his might.

Jeanie would have followed him, but Falcon held her firmly, and she turned upon him with bitter rage. She was frantic and miserable—utterly incapable of coolly reasoning out the folly of her desire. She was sensible only that her husband had quitted her in wrath, had roughly shaken her from him as false and worthless; that he might be even at the moment in peril of his life; and that the man on whose account all his foul accusations had been raised would not let her go to help him. In that state she became herself unjust.

"What are ye haudin me here for?" she cried passionately, "when my man's life maybe hings in the balance. Hae ye no wrought me ill eneuch in bringing me here to make a guid kind man scorn me? Would ye force me to bide in the same house a' nicht wi' ye, that there might be nae chance left me o' ever clearin' mysel' o' the shame ye hae brought on me?"

He winced under the cruel words, and his brow flushed.

"I had nae hand in bringing ye here, Jeanie, I swear it afore Heaven. Whoever has perpetrated the cursed trick by which this has been brought about; I had no share in it. Hae your senses quite forsaken ye? Hae ye forgotten who ye are speaking to?—me who would hae gien life itself gladly if it could hae spared ye this nicht's suffering. What gain would it be to me to shame ye?"

"Oh I ken it a' weel eneuch noo, I see it plain. Ye thought ye would shame me sae that I would be glad to gang awa wi' ye to hide mysel' frae the scorn o' the folk. But ye're mis-

ta'en ; for though a' the toon and a' the countryside turned the finger o' scorn against me, I wouldna gang wi' ye."

"For the Lord's sake dinna speak ony mair," he exclaimed horror stricken. "I am as blameless o' the wicked thought as the wean unborn. O Jeanie, Jeanie, I believed that when ye were married there was no second misfortune that could give me so sharp a wound ; but these words ye hae spoken hae struck far deeper and far mair cruelly than even the knowledge that ye were lost to me for ever."

She burst into tears wringing her hands piteously.

"Oh why, why did ye bide here a single day after ye promised me that ye would gang awa'—that we should never meet again—when ye ken'd that every hour ye staid was only adding to your sorrow and mine? Why, why did ye no gang awa' before this happened?"

"I staid because I had an act o' justice to you, to mysel', and to others, to perform. But I came up here to bide, that no chance might bring me across your path. I hae never been near your dwelling since that day we parted : I hae avoided every road that I thought there was the least chance o' your travelling on."

"But why did ye no gang awa' at ance?"

"Because I have been daily expecting Ivan Carrach to arrive. I blame him for a' the misfortune that has befallen us, and I was determined that he should never wrong another. It seemed to me in my anger and misery that it would be some consolation for the ruin he had wrought, to see him swing on the gallows."

"Ye were wrang, ye were wrang to bide a minute for onything."

"I ken that noo"—(bitterly)—“and I will prove to you that the evil spirit that prompted your tongue to speak that black suspicion of me lied, for I will resign all hope of justice, all chance of vengeance, and go away. You were just now afraid to remain here because I would be with you, but that fear need not trouble you any longer. You blamed me for lingering here, and I ken that I was mad to do it, for whilst I was

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fancying that I was learning to forget ye, I was taking bitter pleasure in breathing the same air that ye breathed, in looking doon the glen where ye dwelt, and in hearing about ye frae the only true friend I hae had, puir Wattie there."

He paused an instant, his voice failing him, and he shaded his eyes with his arm to hide the tears which were in them.

Wattie, who had been all this time moving restlessly about, uncertain what to do with himself and sorely puzzled by the evident distress of the two persons who, after his mother and Dawnie, he cared most about—hearing his name mentioned, crept noiselessly to his friend's side. He took one of his hands stealthily, and looked at him with queer wistful expression, as if he would offer comfort and sympathy if he had only known how.

Falcon impatiently drew his sleeve across his eyes.

"Pshaw—I'm like a bairn. Enough, ye shall never hae another chance to blame me for lingering. I leave ye now, and so help me Heaven you shall never look on me in life again unless ye beg me yoursel' to come to ye."

He snatched up a bonnet from the table—it was Wattie's, but he did not observe the mistake; and Wattie himself was too much bewildered by all that he had seen and heard to observe the danger of his losing that treasure which he had hitherto guarded so carefully.

Jeanie had listened with confusedly mingled feelings of anguish, satisfaction, and fear—anguish at the miserable events of the night, satisfaction that he had proved himself the honest faithful man she had loved and believed him to be, and fear lest anything should happen to him. But she had grown calmer and stronger whilst he spoke, and she felt that she was driving him out to unknown danger in the storm and perilous roads from a mere selfish desire to shield herself.

"I hae tried ye sairly, Jeamie," she said imploringly; "but I was distracted, and didna ken weel what I was saying—will ye forgie me thae fause words I spoke enoo?"

"Aye, freely, and it will make my heart easier on the road seeing ye hae asked me to forgie them."

"I think I haes been out o' my judgment a wee the nicht, but I'm mair mysel' noo. I ken that I was wrang to blame ye, and wrang to fear anything that fause tongues micht say about us. I haes nae fear for them noo. Bide here then till daylicht—"

He interrupted her.

"No, Jeanie, I winna bide here another hour. Dinna try to persuade me, for I canna yield. I am going now. Shake hands first; there can be nae harm in that. Ye wouldna refuse to be frien's wi' a man that was dying; and so far as ye are concerned I'm a dying man."

He spoke so resolutely, and with such a grim sad smile, that she was convinced she could not move him from his purpose.

"I think it's you wha are unreasonable noo," she exclaimed distressfully. "Lord, Lord, pity me and help me. Oh why is a' this put on me? Dinna make me answerable for twa lives."

"The Lord will pity you, Jeanie, and help you; and when I gang awa' that will be the best proof to Robin Gray of how much he has wrangled you and me baith."

"Dinna gang till morning—it'll be safe then. Do ye no hear how the storm is raging? The very sound o't chills my heart and makes my bloud cauld."

"And yet ye would hae gane out in't a' two or three minutes ago."

"Aye, aye, but that was mysel' that would hae been in danger, no you."

"The greater the danger the stronger is the proof that I love you, Jeanie, more than myself—that I love you too much to gie the tongue o' scandal the chance o' stinging ye wi' its venom. Good-bye, good-bye, my poor lass, and take courage, for the truth will come uppermost in spite o' everything. Before morning I'll be miles awa' frae ye if I'm living."

And without giving her time to say more, he wrung her hands quickly and strode out of the house.

Wattie started at his sudden departure, and ran round the table looking for his bonnet.

"Hey, Jeamie, Jeamie Falcon," he called excitedly, "bide a minute till I get my bonnet and I'll gae wi' ye."

He found Falcon's cap lying on the floor, and, placing it on his head, he ran out calling with all his might.

Jeanie was left alone, dazed and helpless in her anguish.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE BROWNIE'S BITE.

"O dismal night!" she said and wept,  
    'O night presaging sorrow,  
O dismal night!" she said and wept,  
    'But more I dread to-morrow.'—*Sir G. Elliot.*

SHE had no strength to stay him; but when the door closed she crouched on a chair, shivering and moaning, too weak to stand, too much stunned by the tortures of the last hour to be able to realize the import of the circumstances at once.

In that hour the agony of a long life seemed to have been concentrated; and her gentle nature had been distracted by the most afflicting of human passions—terror at the wild wrath of her husband—shame and indignation under his unjust reproaches—terror again at the danger to which he was exposing himself—anger with Falcon as the cause of all—and then remorse for the injustice she had done him.

She was overwhelmed and borne down to the earth, so that, for the first few minutes after she had been left alone, she was incapable of connected thought or action of any kind.

But presently she was quickened by a species of frenzy or desperation, and she started to her feet, drawing her plaid tightly around her. She felt as if she were going mad, and that action of some sort was necessary to save her.

"He was richt—Jeamie was richt for his ain sake and mine to gang awa at ance in spite o' tempest and darkness. And what am I biding here for? There's naebody to hinder me

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noo, and its richt that I should gang awa' to my hame in spite o' tempest and darkness though I should dee on the way. Lord forgie me the thought, but I feel as though it would be a guid thing to dee the noo and get awa frae a' this weary sorrow. Oh it's hard, hard to thole."

She crept to the door and opened it. A fierce gust of wind swept in upon her, the rain dashed in her face, and at the same time a vivid fork of lightning darted athwart the black sky, flashing in her eyes and blinding her so that she shrunk back as the thunder pealed along the hills.

But she was no stranger to the spectacle of the fury of the elements; so she drew her plaid the more tightly over her head and under her chin, and stepped carefully out from the house. Another flash of lightning dazzled her eyes again; and although it rendered everything around her for a second as clearly visible as in broad daylight, the darkness which ensued was more impenetrable than before, and she turned to the left instead of to the right in quitting the doorway.

She soon, however, discovered that she was walking on grass, and knew by that she had missed the road. Cautiously she endeavoured to find it again; but this was no easy task, for she had passed round the corner of the house, and having got to the back of it, there was no gleam of light to guide her.

She was regaining confidence as her eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness, when suddenly she stood quite still, with quickening pulse.

Above the roar of the spate, as it rushed furiously down the glen, tearing trees and boulders of rock with it in its impetuous course—above the eerie wailing of the wind and the splashing of rain, she fancied she heard men's voices in angry discussion near her. Then rapid trampling of feet, as it might have been in a scuffle, and another swift glare of lightning revealed it all to her. She uttered a piercing scream.

She had discovered that she had wandered so far from the right course that she was within a few yards of the brink of the Brownie's Bite. That was not the cause of her scream.

The last seen, as we might see figures in a mist, two men on the very lip of the black abyss ~~surrounding~~ maddly.

Immediately, like the echo of her own cry, but wilder, shriller, and more terrible to hear, there rose a shriek of mortal agony, and she knew that one of the men had been cast over the precipice into the foaming waste.

The sound transmuted; and there seemed to her to follow a moment of deathly silence. It was the feeling of one who has been standing beside a cannon when it explodes, and the ears are deafened to all other sounds.

Who were the men she had seen?

A vague sickening dread oppressed her as the question involuntarily flashed through her mind. But she could not, dare not, think of the answer which suggested itself. She was abruptly raised from the species of stupor into which she had fallen by a man stumbling against her.

"What's that? What's ado here?" he said, gripping her, and then suddenly releasing her with the exclamation—"You!"

She recognized the voice. The horrible answer to that question throbbed itself upon her; she clasped her head with her hands, and then, utterly worn out and exhausted by the storm of emotion she had undergone, she sank to the ground insensible.

It was a happy unconsciousness to all suffering, to all the misery which encompassed her. When she recovered she would have been glad indeed to have sunk back into that blissful oblivion.

It was morning; the rain had ceased, but the wind was still high, and the fury of the spate was almost unabated. A pale watery mist hung over the hills; the grass lay heavy and glistening wet. Trees torn up by the roots, huge stones lying on the fields, and the barn beaten down to the earth, indicated the desolation of the previous night.

She was lying on the bed in the kitchen of Askaig house when Anna returned. She was alone; and as soon as she recognized the place she closed her eyes again with a weary sigh, praying with bitter fervency for the great physician Death to come and relieve her of her pain.

There was a singing in her ears as if her head had been under water. She felt sick and giddy, and so feeble that she did not seem to have strength enough to rise from the bed. Yet everything of the sad night's work was cruelly distinct in her memory.

One faint gleam of hope momentarily illumined the darkness of her mind: was it possible that the terrible vision the lightning had revealed to her had been only a vision? Had she sunk under the agitation of Robin's accusations and the parting with him and Falcon, and had that most horrible episode of the past night been nothing more than the wild dream of a tortured and fevered imagination? It had been all so brief, so slight, that it was like a dream.

But his voice?—that could not have been heard in a dream so clearly: the sound was ringing in her ears now, and her pulse stood still with the terror it inspired—not on her own, but his account.

A heavy footstep on the earthen floor caused her to look round. Lang Rob Keith was approaching the bed, gazing at her. His dress was untidy, his short shaggy hair was shaggier than usual, and particles of straw were sticking on the woollen breast of his jacket and in his hair. He had in brief the drowsy appearance of one who has had no sleep during the night, and who had been resting on a heap of straw. More remarkable than this, however, was the expression of fright on his unwashed face.

The instant he observed that her eyes were open, he halted.

"Hoo do ye find yoursel' noo, mistress?" he queried in a subdued tone, as if he were afraid of his own voice.

"Better, thank ye" (faintly).

"Troth and I'm richt glad to hear't. Just ye lie still and I'll kendle a fire in a minute, and get ye some het brose. I'm no guid at making porridge, but I'm a prime hand at brose, and there's some fine new milk ye'll get to them, for I hae just been awa' milking the cow."

"Dinna heed for me—I couldna take onything."

"Deed but ye'll hae to take something," ejaculated Rob,

seizing an axe and proceeding to chop wood, "or ye'll just be fa'in back as bad's ever again, and no a living soul here to dae ought for ye but mysel', and nae way either o' getting word sent down that ye're no weel."

"Hae they a' gane awa' then?" (hesitatingly, and after a pause).

"Every ane o' them; even Wattie Todd's gane, and whar the dementit cratur's daunert tae, Guid kens. He couldna cross the burn onyway, sae he maun hae gane ower the hills, if he's no lyin' drooned somewhar."

"Surely no that; he gaed awa' after—after Jeames Falcon, and he's weel acquaint wi' the road, so that the poor laddie would be safe wi' him."

Rob made no reply; but he glanced uneasily over his shoulder, as if half expecting to see something at the door. He continued his exertions to kindle the fire with renewed zeal.

"I dinna mind lying doon here," Jeanie said again after another pause; "did I faint, and was't you brought me here?"

Lang Rob was apparently disturbed by the question, and responded in a low voice—

"Aye, ye was in a faint."

"Where?" (eagerly and yet tremulously, for she dreaded the confirmation of her own knowledge).

"Weel, gin ye maun ken, ye was outby ahint the house, and I found ye lying on the ground as though ye'd been dead. I carried ye in and put ye on the bed, and syne I learnt that there was naebody left but oursel's."

"Were ye looking for me when ye found me?"

"Na, for I hadna come in frae the time I gaed oot to look for—your guidman, till I carried ye in."

"Did ye see him?"

She put the question with a degree of nervous excitement which threatened a relapse. But Rob was silent.

"How did ye happen to be round at that side o' the house?" she went on.

Rob's uneasiness increased, and his expression of fright became more marked.

"Hoo did ye happen to be there?" he queried, instead of satisfying her.

"I missed the road."

"Weel, I was just looking in a' airts for your guidman when I maist tum'let ower ye."

Her weakness was overcome by her agitation, and she raised herself on her elbow.

"But ye never expected to find him there at the edge o' the Brownie's Bite," she said piteously. "For the Lord's sake answer me, Rob Keith, if ye dinna want me to gang wud—did ye see my man there?"

Rob turned his frightened face to her, and seeing how deeply she was moved rejoined in a whisper—

"I didna mean to tell ye or to say ought o't tae onybody; but I'll tell ye the truth since ye winna let me haud my tongue."

"Tell me" (closing her lips and trying to muster strength to listen calmly).

"Dinna blame me syne, for ye force me to speak. I had been doon the road a gey bit hallooing after Cairnieford till I was hearse. I was coming back, and was just by the house when I thocht a man passed me. I shouted, but got nae answer. I followed and missed him. I suspectit that I was on the top of the Brownie. A flash of lightning showed me that I was richt in my guess."

"Did it show ye naething forbye?"

A long pause, and then with slow unwillingness—

"Aye, it showed me twa men, and the minute after I heard a maist awfu' skirl that gar'd my flesh creep and my teeth chatter. I think I'll never get the better o' the fricht."

"What was it?"

"Ane o' the twa men tum'let ower the Bite as sure as I'm a livin' sinner."

"What did ye do?"

"Do?—troth I was ower muckle dumbfoonert to dae onything, or I'd hae run into the house and stekkit the door. But I couldna steer a peg till I heard a man near me saying Wha's that? I made a loup for the place and grippit him."

"Who?"

"Cairnieford."

"Are ye sure o' that—will ye swear that before Heaven?"  
(distractedly).

"Aye" (in a steady whisper) "if I was ca'ed tae judgment this minute I would swear it was Cairnieford spoke to me."

"He spoke—what did he say?"

"It was me spoke first. I speired at him what he had dune, and he just dragged me twa'r three steps forrit to the place whar ye was lying, and syne he said, 'Take her into the house.' Wi' that he gied himsel' a twist out o' my grip, and was awa' in a minute. I brought ye in and barred the door; but I haena gotten a wink o' sleep a' nicht. That awfu' skirl has been dingin' in my lugs and coming doon the lum wi' ilka blast o' wind, frichtening me clean out o' my five senses. Lord kens what's been dune, but I'm wae to think o' what I fear."

"What is it ye fear?" (gaspingly).

The man trembled from head to foot, again glancing uneasily toward the door.

"Dinna speir that, for mercy's sake. I daurna gie't words.  
. . . There noo, ye're awa wi't again."

He strode to the bed. She had sunk back, uttering no sound, but shuddering and with a face so ghastly that he had every reason to fear that she was about to relapse into insensibility.

"Gie me a drink," she said in a feeble tone. "I'll be better in a minute."

He filled a bowl with the warm milk he had just brought in, and held it to her lips. The draught refreshed and soothed her; and Rob, seeing that, hastened to boil the water and make the brose, under the impression that she would be thoroughly revived by a dishful of that mixture of oatmeal and hot water, which, to render the more toothsome for his patient, he improved by the addition of a lump of butter. All his persuasions, however, could not make her partake, whereat he was grievously disappointed.

"Aweel, we's no waste guid meat, sae if ye winna I will," he said philosophically, sitting down and proceeding to sup, pausing, however, with his horn spoon in the dish, to give her one more chance: "Are ye sure ye'll no hae them? they'd dae ye a hantle mair guid nor onything I ken o'."

But as she still resisted, he began at once and supped with relish, looking much more himself by the time he had satisfied his hunger than he had done since the previous day.

Smacking his lips he looked round to the bed, and saw that the haggard face of the woman was turned toward him, watching him strangely. There was something so queer in the look that he rose uneasily from his chair.

"She's gaun clear crack," he muttered to himself; "mercy on us, what am I to dae here a' my lane wi' a dementit woman to look after? A score mair beasts would be naething tae't."

"I was gann to ask ye a favour, Rob," she said in her faint tremulous voice.

"Ask onything ye like, mistress, and I'll dae't, gin it can be dune."

"It was . . . just no to mention what ye hae told me, unless ye canna help it."

"Hae nae fear o' that; I can keep my thumb on a thing as weel as onybody when I mak' up my mind till't; and it's no likely that I would be the ane to bring Cairnieford into a scrape if onything I could dae would keep him oot o't, for he was ay a guid frien' tae me."

"Ye promise that?"

"Aye, willingly. I'll no speak o't to a living creatur' . . . hooly, hooly, mistress, ye'll fa'."

She had risen from the bed, and on trying to stand had staggered dizzily. Rob ran to her assistance, and steadied her with his hand.

"Heaven bless you and yours, Rob Keith," she murmured; "and may ye never ken what sorrow is."

"Ye'd better lie doon again, ye're no able to stand."

"I was ust a wee thing dizzy; but it's awa noo. I canna

bide here langer; I maun get hame someway, for I cauna, daurna, rest until I ken what has come o' him."

Rob, however willing he might have been to get rid of her if she had been crazy, as he had for a moment suspected, was too good-natured and too sincerely sorry for her plight to be ready to let her go so long as there was any danger. He therefore urged her to remain until the afternoon, when she would be stronger and abler for the journey, and when the burn would possibly have subsided to something of its ordinary dimensions, so as to be more easily fordable.

But she would not delay, and finding his arguments as ineffective on this subject as they had been regarding the brose, he said he would "yoke the cart," that she might drive across the burn if it were practicable.

"Syne ye can drive yoursel' hame, and send ane o' the lads back wi' the cart; an' ye might let him gang as far's the toon, and bring my guidwife wi' him. She was to hae come hame the day onyway. But first I'll gae see what like the water is."

As soon as he had quitted the house, Jeanie proved that, once on her feet, she could use them. She went out, passed round the house and made straight for the brink of the Brownie's Bite, scanning the ground anxiously as she proceeded. She only halted within two yards of the edge.

The evidence she sought was there, plain—terribly plain, and readable. The earth, softened by the heavy rain, bore the deep imprints of men's feet, crossing and recrossing each other, and making long ruts where a foot had slipped—all giving mute but clear testimony of a struggle.

Evidence of the fatal result of that struggle was afforded by the paling which guarded the edge of the precipice against the cattle. It had not been renewed for some time, was rotten, and beside the footprints a portion of it was broken away, as if some weight had fallen against it and carried it down the abyss.

She would have given the whole world to have been able to obliterate these fatal signs. She tried it, and she trampled on them; but her feeble efforts seemed only to mark the hateful

spot the more distinctly. Besides there was the paling; she could not mend that.

"O Lord of heaven, pity him," she cried with clasped hands, "and direct me; it canna—canna be that he would hae done this awfu' thing if he had been himself'; him that was ay sae kind and gentle wi' the dumb brutes couldna—couldna raise his hand against the life o' a fellow-creature. There's been some mischance atween them—they maun hae come across ane another by accident, and Jeamie would be trying to explain, and Robin would want to get awa' frae him, and Jeamie, trying to haud him—maun hae missed his foot and—"

She looked at that open space in the paling and turned from it with a sickly shudder.

"I'll no believe that it could hae been ony other way—I'll no believe it till he tells me wi' his ain lips that he did it wilfully. Lord help and pity him, for he needs baith mair nor me noo. Oh, he may scorn and hate me a' the mair that this has happened; but I winna forsake him. I'll cleave to him and be a true wife in spite o' scorn and hate and wrang; and surely Heaven will help me to do what's richt."

The resolution, which grew out of her despair, imbued her with a calmness and strength that rendered her step firm as she returned to the house.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE SEARCH.

"Ye dark rolling clouds round the brow of Ben Borrow,  
O weep your dark tears to the green vales below;  
Ye winds of the hill, wake your wailings of sorrow,  
No beams of the morning can gladness bestow."—*P. M. Arthur.*

LANG ROB was waiting for her in some surprise at her absence. As soon as he saw her he suspected where she had been; but he made no reference to the matter. He had gone out himself

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in the morning to look at the place, and had seen the proofs of the night's tragedy.

He informed her that the water had considerably subsided, and that he believed it would be fordable in a couple of hours. She would fain have persuaded him to let her attempt it at once; but he was stubborn on that score. He dared not risk the loss of cart and horse, especially when one of the best stots had gone already.

"A stot gane?" she cried with sudden eagerness—  
"When?"

"Last nicht, some time; ye mind hoo lang I was out looking for the stupid brute."

"Aye, aye, I mind ye speaking o't," and her eyes brightened with hope; "and nae doubt it was the stot that tumbled—"

She checked herself: she did not wish him to surmise what she had been doing, or what had been the result of her observations. He understood her, however, and under the plea of having to give the horse a feed and a "rub doon" preparatory to the journey, he hurried away to the stable in order that he might not by any slip of the tongue, or unconscious expression, betray his knowledge of the futility of her hope. Long after he had missed the stot, and had searched in every direction for it, he had examined the paling and had found it whole.

Controlling as best she might her impatience to reach home and learn whether or not her husband had arrived there, she waited the expiry of the two hours. The horse was harnessed and yoked to a heavy cart, and Rob drove slowly down the road to the ford. The water was rushing in a long steady black line through the glen; but it was not deep enough to present any formidable obstacle to a strong horse. Rob resigned the reins to Jeanie, and she drove across safely.

"That's a' richt," he cried, as the cart rose dripping out of the water on the other side; "ye'll win hame easy noo; just haund him tight by the head as ye gang ower the brae. Ye'll mind to send for my guidwife—only ye needna fash gin

the rain comes on again. I dinna think it will, but if it should, ye'd better keep the horse a' nicht, and she can come up wi't the morn."

Jeanie promised to attend to his instructions, gave him earnest thanks for his kindly services and drove away. He watched her till she had crossed the hill and disappeared on the descent.

Although the distance was only about four miles to Cairnieford, the slow progress of the cart afforded her ample time to review the events which seemed to have placed as many years as there were actually hours between her and yesterday.

With the avidity with which one starving clutches at a bit of bread, she had clutched at the hope suggested by Rob Keith's reference to the lost stot. And now, in spite of all she had seen, in spite of the confirmation of her vision by the fact that Keith had witnessed the same, she argued on all the probabilities of their being mistaken, and on all the impossibilities of Robin Gray being guilty of a crime so dire as that she had imputed to him, until the slender hope blossomed into a kind of conviction. There was a lingering doubt, a lingering sense that she was forcing herself to believe against reason, but it only wavered over the bright moon of her hope like a thin cloud.

When one's whole mind is bent on proving certain foregone conclusions, the most palpable sophistries are accepted for sound argument, particularly when the person to be satisfied is one's self. So with Jeanie; she was glad of anything that hope might build upon and paint into a resemblance to reason. Whether this faculty of guiling one's self be a blessing or not, it comforted her now, and enabled her to think more calmly of what was before her.

She had known from various petty incidents that Robin was a man of strong passions, and capable of as fierce antipathies as likings, although she had never fancied him capable of such unreasoning frenzy as he had displayed at Askaig. She knew, too, that once he had resolved upon anything, it would have been almost as easy to move Ailsa Crag as him.

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Consequently she anticipated much difficulty in obtaining his credence for her explanation of how he had come to find her with Falcon at Askaig.

But that he should know, aye, and be compelled to feel, how innocent she had been of any unworthy thought, she was determined. Whether he might admit the error into which rage and jealousy had betrayed him, and become reconciled, or persist in his decision to separate, he should acknowledge that she was blameless.

That purpose was firmly fixed in her mind when she caught the first glimpse of Cairnieford through the bare trees. The sight of the home in which there had been so much content and happiness previous to that morning when Falcon had risen like a ghost before her, let loose a tide of memories of Robin's love that swelled her heart, and filled her throat with choking sobs.

Somewhat oddly these memories were presently tinged with a degree of bitterness against the man with whom they were associated; for as the fear of physical danger to him subsided, she began to feel that he had been cruel and unjust to her, and that he more than Falcon had destroyed the happiness of their home.

On reaching the house, she found everybody in a state of excitement; first, on account of the absence of the master and mistress during the whole night; next, and most important—for numerous surmises had been made to account for the first occurrence—by the discovery of the carcass of the horse, Brown Jock, in the burn, stuck fast against a huge stone that had served as a sort of breakwater to a little wooden footbridge, which had been swept away by the spate.

The horse was quite dead, and its hide, lacerated in a hideous manner, indicated that it had been carried some distance by the rushing torrent, and dashed against numerous projecting boulders of rock on its course. The regret of the farm folk for the loss of such a fine animal was mingled with the dread of a still greater calamity which the discovery suggested; for they had unanimously come to the conclusion that the master,

who had ridden away in such a furious fashion, could not have escaped a similar fate.

The horse had only been found about an hour previous to the arrival of the mistress ; and the men were just proposing to proceed down the burn in search of the body of their master when they observed her approaching.

They received her with gloomy countenances, yet not without expectation that she would be able to assure them of the guidman's safety. The intelligence that Robin had not been home since he had gone off with Brown Jock startled her, and the spectacle presented by the mutilated carcass of the horse gave her a new shock of horror. It seemed as if the wretched events springing out of Falcon's return were to have no end.

As she was unable to give any account of the whereabouts of her husband, there was nothing to be done but start on the expedition already proposed. First, however, Jeanie despatched one of the men to the neighbouring farm of Boghaugh to inquire if Cairnieford had called there.

In less than an hour the man came back, accompanied by the old farmer Dunbar, his son Jock, and a couple of ploughmen. None of the Boghaugh folk had seen Robin since Monday last ; and, alarmed by the news of his absence and the finding of the horse which the Cairnieford messenger had brought, they had come over to render what assistance they could in the search.

Three of the men immediately started to follow the course of the burn down to the shore ; whilst young Dunbar, Mackie the Cairnieford grieve, and two others, proceeded up the glen, keeping close to the bed of the stream, and as that was a difficult matter owing to the many narrow passes, with high, steep, and sometimes perpendicular sides, through which the current flowed, their progress was necessarily slow. It was therefore agreed that the first party, failing to discover anything on their way to the shore, should hasten after the second, to assist in the more arduous part of the undertaking.

Each party carried ropes and long pitchforks, the latter to

get the peat, keep gullies and fissures in the banks. It was nearly six hours past noon when they started, and they had to make the most of their time, as they would only have about three hours of daylight for the work. ~~Unhappily~~ Any of them could have walked to Askern and back in a couple of hours by the ordinary road, but when they were in follow would hardly double the time even if they had not had the drawback of having to search the stream.

Lizzie and Marjorie were in advance of their companions; and before they had proceeded many paces the former said with impatience, "What o' the heid!"

"I dinnae there's been a gey babbie amween them."

"Awwen what?" quoth Jack Dunbar, a stalwart young fellow, whose white thoughts were bent on the ~~unimpeachable~~ task in hand, and his eyes searching the stream bottom, whilst as always every now his long fork was dipped in the black water.

"Hearken the mistress and her guidman," rejoined the grieve, who was diligent enough in the work, although less active than his comrade. "Cairnieford gaed off yesterday after her in ~~sheer~~ as fury as I never saw him in a life; and did ye no notice the face o' the mistress?"

"Aye, she looked drear like."

"Hearay - Cairnieford miserable, say I. Tak' my word for it, there's been a braw babbie, an' I'm misicatin' we'll find the end o't yonder" (pointing to the water).

"I hope no, though I can jalousie what they would quarrel aboot. Can ye?"

"Hurely; the speak's been out for a week past that Jeamie Watson had come hame, and that he was bidin' up at Askern ~~clean~~ crazy at finding that his dawtie was married to Cairnieford. A'body's talkin' o't, and won'erin' what will be the upshot."

"It's true eneuch that Jeamie cam' hame. I saw him mysel' on Saturday and spoke to him. But he was sae dour that I didna feel to seek him again."

Certain stages of the way were easily traversed, and the

task of sounding the stream was accomplished by simply reaching out the long forks they carried. But gradually as they penetrated the heart of the hills their passage was intercepted by jagged rocks and steep acclivities, at the top of which the forks were useless for sounding purposes.

This difficulty, however, was overcome by Dunbar, who fastened a lump of stone about the size of a bull's head to the end of a rope, and cast it down into the water. By means of this simple drag they were enabled to assure themselves that they did not miss the object of their search. Still it was slow work, and they had made little more than half the distance to Askaig when the deepening shadows of the hills around them intimated that they would not have daylight to complete their task.

The hills rose in solemn gloom above them, and every object at only a few yards' distance was fading into shadow, while dark clouds seemed suddenly to have dipped down touching the earth.

They had now attained a point where they would have been compelled to make a long pause, even had the sun been high above them instead of being low behind the hills. A rock seemed to have been cleft in twain, making a channel for the burn. At the top the ridges leaned towards each other, leaving only a space of about six feet in width. But at the base the water had hollowed out the rock on either side, forming two cavities of several feet in depth, dry when the burn was low.

The searchers were in a strait to find means of examining this place with sufficient care. Mackie proposed that they should cease operations until next day, when they would have light enough to see to the bottom of the chasm, which at present appeared to them only as a black hollow.

Dunbar was indecisively dragging the heavy stone across the current at the bottom, lifting it above the water and swinging it as far under the projecting rock as he could manage. The stone encountered some obstacle. He tugged gently; the obstacle seemed to yield, not like stone.

"There's something yonder," he said in an awe-stricken whisper; and his companions held their breath.

"Better no shift it then till the morn," said Mackie after a pause, also in a whisper.

"Halloo, halloo!"

The men started at the shout which reached their ears, as if they had fancied for a moment that the sound had come up from the depth of the chasm where that "something" was lying.

The halloo was repeated, nearer and more distinct. They answered the signal, peering in the direction whence the sound proceeded. At length they descried two figures approaching, and in a little while they were beside them.

They were two of the men who had been on the search down the burn to the shore.

"Hae ye found onything?" queried Mackie.

"No, we hae nae foun' ought; but whan we got back to the house they tauld us that word had cam' the maister was in the toon safe eneuch."

"Hooray!" shouted the listeners heartily—all except Dunbar.

He regarded the speaker doubtfully.

"Are ye sure o' that?"

"Weel, I'm sure eneuch, gin they haena tauld me a lee about it, an' I ettle they wouldna do that."

"No, they wouldna do that," echoed Dunbar, looking perplexedly down the chasm; "but there's something yonder."

"Fient a hair need we care noo what's there, sin naebody's drooned. Come awa, lad, it'll be dark eneuch afore we win hame," argued Mackie.

"I'd like to ken what it is, though."

"What would it be?"

"A body."

"Hoots, what would a body dae there—onyway leave it till the morn, when we'll be able to see what we're doing; it'll no be a hae't the waur. Ye can let the rape hing there a' nicht,

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and we'll row this stane on tae the end o't to keep it siccar,  
though I'll warrant ye, we's get naething for our pains, but  
aiblins a clod o' peat, or an auld ewe that tint hersel'."

There was a slight laugh at Dunbar's expense, and he turned away with the rest after the rope had been made secure as arranged. The laugh had not been very loud, for there was a certain eerie aspect on the place, with the broad shadows of the hills and the night deepening over it, and the melancholy swish of the stream through the chasm, which restrained mirth. But it was enough to make the young fellow wince and yield his point; for, like most folk, he was more sensitive to ridicule than reason.

A body was lying down there under the rock, although not that of Robin Gray.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A MESSAGE.

"And are ye sure the news is true,  
And are ye sure he's weel?"—*Jean Adams.*

JEANIE had seen the men start on the search with a kind of trepidation, which she could not clearly define to herself. It was not fear that they would find her husband—for recollecting that when he had encountered her on the top of the Brownie's Bite he had been without the horse, she calculated that the animal must have been lost before he had arrived at Askaig. It was a fear lest they should find somebody else—whom, she dared not whisper to herself.

She had detained her father from accompanying the searchers, as he had intended, by telling him that she had need of his help for another mission. She purposed sending him to Clashgirn to make inquiries about Falcon, as she thought it probable that, before quitting the country finally, he would either visit the Laird or send him some message. She was anxious to be assured in some way, that the fine hypothesis she

had erected to account for the broken paling might be established beyond the faintest doubt.

As soon as Adam had seen the men fairly off, he returned to his daughter, and interrupted the kindly condolence which old Boghaugh was offering her with the question he had already asked several times.

"In the name o' Heaven, Jeanie, what does it a' mean?—what's gaen wrang between ye and Robin?"

"We hae had a quarrel, faither, that's what's wrang."

"A quarrel—what about?" (frowning as if, being a woman, she must be to blame).

"If ye'll let me see my mother for a minute, I'll tell ye a'. Ye'll bide, Boghaugh, and hear't, for ye're a friend baith to me and Robin, and ye'll judge between us."

"I never like to meddle between man and wife," said Boghaugh, shaking his grey head cautiously; "but I winna refuse to help ye if I see ony houp o' a word o' mine doing ony guid, though I hae ay found that man and wife settle their ain bickerings best when left to themsel's. Heaven send that Robin may hae the chance o' doing't."

"I dinna ask ye to interfere between him and me, Boghaugh; but other folk will be talking, I misdoubt, and I want ye to ken the richts o' the matter."

"Weel, let's hear," broke in Adam authoritatively.

"Afore I say a word, I want ye to take the powny and ride ower to Clashgirn, and speir gin the folk there hae seen or heard frae Jeames Falcon."

"Falcon? Is't true then what the folk are saying that he's came hame?"

"Ower true; but haste ye awa'; it'll no take ye mair nor half an hour, and by that time I'll be ready to explain everything."

The calmness with which she was speaking amazed herself. In spite of the dull aching at her heart she was outwardly the most self-possessed of any of those around her. With an unusual clearness she recollected the most trivial circumstances; and amongst other things, she remembered that she

had not yet fulfilled her promise to Rob Keith to send the cart for his wife.

She hastened to repair the oversight; and as the men were all away and the herd-boy had taken advantage of the confusion paramount to escape on some private frolic, she despatched one of the lassies to the Port.

Then she went up to her mother—still in a dreamy way marvelling at her own calmness—and, as she expected, the bedridden woman had received distorted and disconnected rumours from some of the girls of the passing events, and was in a high fever of alarm, rendered all the more acute by her helplessness to satisfy herself as to what was really going forward.

She was still occupied in the difficult task of trying to soothe her mother when she heard the sharp voice of Girzie Todd in the kitchen below inquiring for her. Girzie was the very person who would be most likely to help her to discover what had become of Falcon. So she went down immediately.

"Ye're there," was Girzie's abrupt salutation. "I met the lass gaun into' the toon for Rob Keith's wife, and she tauld me ye had come hame. Did ye no bring my Wattie wi' ye?"

Jeanie had forgotten all about Wattie; but she remembered now.

"I haena seen him since last night, when he gaed out after Jeames Falcon."

"And where's he gaen till?"

Jeanie beckoned her to follow to the door, and there she rapidly recounted what had occurred. Girzie was apparently already aware of a portion of it—how, was explained by her comment.

"Ye needna fash yoursel' to try the burn seeking your guidman. I cam' here on an errand frae him."

"Frae him—then he's safe and weel?"

"He's safe, sae far as that he's no drooned; but he's a lang road frae being weel. He looks mair like the ghaist o' himsel' nor onything else, and he's as weak as an auld wife coming out o' the jaundice, and as ill-looking."

"Whar is he, Girzie, tell me quick?"

"He's just at my bigging, nae mair nor less; he said he couldna gang to the inn for the shame o' folk glowerin' at him and speaking o' him; and he couldna thole to come near the house here yet, for the thochts it would gie him—thinking about ye nae doubt."

"I'll gang to him this minute."

"Na, ye'd better no do that; it's no ye he wants, but your faither. He doesna ken ye're hame, and frae the way he was speaking o' ye, I think it wouldna do him guid to see ye till he's a wee thing quieter. Save's a', it made my heart sair to see him and hear him; for ae minute he's clean broken doon, sabbin' and greetin' like a wean ower a bad apple, and the neist he's rampangin' about, roarin' and swearin' as though a' the deils that drooned the swine had got haud o' him."

"That makes me a' the mair anxious to win till him. O Girzie, woman, how could I bide here and thole the thoughts o' a' this sufferin' for nae cause, when maybe a word frae me would make a' plain?"

"Whiles the truest words look like the biggest lees, and he's just in the dementit state to think them sae."

"It sha'na be my fault then if he doesna ken the truth. When did he come to your house?"

"No aboon three hours syne. He's been walking aboot a' nicht, and he cam' round by the laigh road and sae got across the brig doon by at the shore. He's sair dune out, but he wouldna hear o' lying doon to rest."

"There's my father comin'; we'll gang awa to him this minute."

"Ye'll do as ye like, and I haena time to argue wi' ye. I want to ken about Wattie."

"I can tell ye naething mair about him than what I hae done."

"Lord hae mercy on us," cried Girzie, and her hard features became wrinkled with a spasm of pain; "surely Jeamie Falcon wouldna be sae daft as tak' the puir creature awa' frae his hame and me."

"Maybe Jeamie hasna gane awa' yet; my father was ower at Clashgirn speirin' for him."

But Adam came up and told them that nothing whatever was known at Clashgirn regarding Falcon's movements.

Girzie's face was troubled.

"Ye'll hae to find Jeamie. He's the only ane that can tell ye whar Wattie is; and nae doubt they're thegither," said Jeanie.

"Find him—aye, though I should travel frae land's end to land's end, I maun find him. But no, he wouldna, he couldna be sic a thochtless gowk as let him gae wi' him; he's maybe sent him hame or noo. My puir bairn couldna dae onything for himsel', and wha is there would dae wi' him as I hae dune? But I maun haste awa' after him wharever he's gane till—the gomeril."

Girzie departed with more anxiety concerning her son than she had chosen to display. She knew how strong had been the affection with which he had come to regard Falcon, and that with all the simple thoughtlessness of a child, and the fidelity of a dog, he would be ready to follow him anywhere. She believed, however, that Falcon would send him home, provided Wattie did not fall into one of his "thrawn" humours. He was capable at such times of pursuing his own desire in spite of anything that might be said or done to him.

"But what'll the dozent cratur' dae to find his way hame?" she müttered, striding along with clenched teeth; "he'll no ken the road, and there's nae saying what may come ower him. Syne gin he's thrawn and winna leave Jeamie, what'll be dune? I'll hae to gang after him onyway or he'll lose himsel' a'thegither. Neighbor Tait 'll see to Dawnie till we get back. Oh the stupid thochtless fallow, to gang fleeing awa' frae his mither that gate. I'll warm his chafts for him when I get haud o' him—my puir bairn."

And the woman was as much inclined to cry as to be angry. There was the resolution of a strong nature expressed on her embrowned visage, across which the shadows of anxiety flitted now and again as she fancied the occurrence of some accident

to her son. She certainly would not halt until she had discovered him, no matter how far she might have to travel.

She, however, expected that the farthest she would have to travel would be to Ayr, although she was prepared to go on to Southampton to seek Falcon on board the *Victory*, whither, she had no doubt, he would proceed. She remembered the name of the frigate and the port easily, for they had been repeated often enough by Wattie.

Jeanie gave her father Girzie's message, which had the effect of puzzling and delighting the old man.

"What I was gaun to tell ye, faither and Boghaugh, I'll tell ye noo in Robin's presence, and I look tae ye to gar him hear me as well."

"Nae fear o' that, he'll hear ye. He's no an unreasonable man, though it does look unco queer that he winna come to his ain house to say whatever he wants."

"Ye dinna ken the state he's in, faither, or what he's thinking."

"No, I canna make out what the habble is about ava, and that clean bamboozles me."

"He thinks, faither" (her voice shaking), "he thinks that I was gaun to rin awa' wi' Jeannie Falcon."

"What would ye dae that for!" queried Adam, looking for a minute more puzzled than ever; and then with a stern frown, as the probabilities of the case and the consequent shame flashed upon him, he gripped her by the arm. "Ye never thocht o' daeing that," he said harshly; "ye woulndna disgrace them wha hae been true and kind to ye, even in your thocht?"

"Never, faither, never."

Adam raised his head stiff, proud, and calm.

"I couldna think ye would, Jeanie, wi' the upbringing ye hae had, and I wonner at Robin that he could hae sae far forgot himself as to doubt ye. But what was the cause o't?"

"Ye shall hear a' in his presence."

"I can bide till then. I'm no feared but ye'll come throngh't a' an honest woman."

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Always hard and dry, the shock he had sustained by the hint as to the cause of quarrel between her and Robin seemed to have softened him. She could not recall any occasion on which he had spoken to her so kindly as now, and his trust comforted her.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### STRIFE.

“But to think I was betrayed,  
That falsehood e'er our loves should sunder ;  
To take the flow'ret to my breast,  
And find the guilefu' serpent under.”

*Mrs. Riddel of Woodleigh.*

ROBIN GRAY was sitting on one of the cutty stools in Girzie Todd's cot. He was bent almost double, his hands covering his face, his elbows resting on his knees. He had paced the narrow limits of the floor for half an hour after Girzie had departed with his message to Adam Lindsay. At every turn he had cast an agitated glance through the little window at the narrow lane, as if impatiently watching for her return before she had time to reach Cairnieford. It was a dull miserable afternoon, everything wearing the bleak drenched aspect which a storm leaves behind it. The wind was stirring the thatches of the houses, shaking out the rain in heavy drops, which formed into dirty pools on the ground.

Even had his mind been undisturbed, the man would have been affected by this dismal weather, and in his present humour it oppressed him tenfold : it was so suggestive of the dreary hopeless future that lay before him.

Then he had seated himself on the stool. His eyes were sunken and bloodshot, his hair tossed and matted, and deep blue lines under the eyes added twenty years to his apparent age. His broad shoulders were bent as if under the burden of his sorrow, and altogether his stalwart form had the appearance of being utterly broken down. The passion which had burst upon him.

As if he would shut out the spectacle of his own misery, he had bowed his head on his hands with an agony too deep for any utterance to relieve it.

In that position Adam and old Mr. Dunbar found him when they arrived—Jeanie was waiting outside till they should prepare him to see her.

He looked up quickly on their entrance, expecting Girzie, and both of the comers were surprised by the marked change in his appearance, from that of a hale sturdy man of middle age to the wreck now before them.

"I didna expect to see you here, Boghaugh," he said wearily, and rising slowly; "but maybe it's as weel ye hae come."

"Certes, man, I scarcely expekit to see you here or onywhar else an hour syne," rejoined Dunbar; "and I would be mair sorry to see ye lookin' sae badly if it wasna that I'm weel pleased to see ye ava. Man, ye gied us a' a skear."

"How was that?" (indifferently).

"Your horse was found dead in the burn, and we thocht ye would be found in the same condition. The folk are awa' raking the water for ye enoo."

"Puir brute, I nicht hae been wi' him" (abstractedly, and as if he were barely thankful for his escape); "but when I got to Askaig I didna tether him fast eneuch. So he broke loose, and, I suppose, frichted, and trying to cross the burn to win hame, was carried awa' wi' the spate. I jaloused as muckle, though I spent about three hours seeking for him."

"Aye, weel, it was lucky for ye that ye wasna on his back, for he's an awfu' sight."

"Lucky?"

"Aye, do ye no think sae?"

"I couldna say; but sit doon, baith o' ye. I hae to speak o' a matter that'll keep us some time, and my head's sae dazed that I canna get at the marrow o't sae quick as I would like. Sit doon."

Boghaugh was a cautious man, who, as he had declared, objected to meddle with his neighbours' affairs, and he felt a little awkward at present under the consciousness that, with

Jeanie lurking outside, he was engaged in something like a conspiracy against the man to whom he was speaking. He sat down. Adam, who had not yet opened his lips, remained standing, stiff and stern.

"Ye wanted to speak wi' me," he said now in an abrupt manner. "What for would ye no come to your ain house to say't? Ye hae had a quarrel wi' your guidwife, I ken; but I thocht ye was a man o' ower muckle common sense to mak' an ado like this."

Instead of feeling the least dissatisfaction with this rebuke Robin advanced to him and laid his hand on the old man's shoulder, looking in his weather-beaten face sadly.

"I'm glad ye ay thocht that, Adam," he said with unsteady voice, "because ye'll be the readier to believe that I'm no like to make sic a steer without guid reason for't."

"When I ken your reason for't, I'll be better able to gie ye my opinion."

Robin regarded him in silence for a minute, and then, with a deep-drawn breath—

"Aye, weel, I see that ye think me in the wrang—Oh, Heaven, that I had been sae!"

It was a passionate outcry, checked instantly by the hopeless calm with which he had just addressed them. He was desirous of maintaining that appearance of calmness, but in spite of himself, in spite of his despair, his emotion at times would rise uppermost.

"But there's nae use wishing for hairst in December," he resumed. "I sent for ye to come to me here, because I couldna thole to look on the house where we hae been sae happy thegither, kenning that it was a' by, that the sun will never make the place bricht ony mair for me. It's a bitter eneuch thocht in itsel', without carrying it amongst the things that are livin' wi' her memory. Every buss that grows about the place would mind me o' her and the joy I hae lost, and the shame I mann bear; the stane at the door she used to stand on to welcome me hame, wi' her bonnie blythsome face, would bring back every look that was to me like licht frae

aboon, and that noo makes my loss the mair; the chair she used to sit in by the ingle neuk, the books she used to read—a' thing, a' thing is haunted by her presence, and I daurna look on them."

To this piteous wail neither of the listeners made any reply, although they could not help being touched by the man's distress. They would have offered consolation if they had only known how; but seeing that the wife for whom he was mourning as lost was just outside the door, they were naturally puzzled to know what to say or do under the circumstances.

Robin presently recovered his composure, and relieved them of the difficulty by proceeding quietly—

"What I wanted ye for, Adam, was to tell ye that I'm gaun awa' the morn—I dinna ken where to, but somewhere a long way beyond sicht and sound o' Portlappoch and Cairnieford. I dinna ken when I'll be back—maybe never. While I'm awa' I want you to take care o' the farm, and keep a'thing in order, sae that if she should ever come hame again she may find a house and friends ready to receive her."

"Wha is't ye're talking about?" interrupted Adam, gruffly.

"My wi——your dochter."

"And what about her coming hame?—she's come hame."

"Come hame?—when?"

"As soon's ever she could win across the burn. What else would she do, and whar else would she gang?"

Robin was at first like one thunderstricken; and then a bitter smile slowly dawned on his countenance.

"Oh aye, I understand," he muttered in a hard sneering tone; "I understand: she's been frichted by what I said yestereen—maybe he's been frichted too, and so she's come hame instead o' gaeing wi' him as she meant to do. But that winna alter me, for she is as guilty in my e'en as though she had gane."

"Guilty o' what, I would like to ken?" said Adam stiffly.

"Guilty o' deceivin' me—guilty o' deceivin' the man she had sworn to abide by till death—to gang awa' wi' Jeames Falcon."

"Ye're speaking o' my dochter, sir, and ye're speaking lees. Jeanie Lindsay was never guilty o' the shame ye charge her wi', even in her thocht."

"Aye, are ye sure o' that?" (sharp and angry)—"then will ye tell me what for she hid frae me that Falcon had been at my house to see her? She hid it frae you tae, or ye're mair a hypocrite than I could hae believed possible. Will ye tell me what for she told me a lee about it, for I mind weel that nicht speirin' if there had been anybody ca'ing? Will ye tell me what for Falcon, that I hae ay been a frien' to, and wanted to serve, should lurk about Askaig for a week, and never send me sae muckle as word that he was living? Will ye tell me what for she gaed to Askaig when I was awa' at the market, and bided there wi' him? I was there. I saw them wi' my ain e'en."

Adam was overwhelmed by this torrent of questions, in the enunciation of which the blood crimsoned Robin Gray's face, and his eyes brightened with ire. Adam was all the more overwhelmed because he was unable to give any satisfactory response.

He was unexpectedly relieved of his difficulty by the opening of the door and the entrance of Jeanie, with a quiet steady regard fixed on her husband.

"Here is my dochter," said the old fisherman excitedly, "and she'll answer ye hersel'."

Robin uttered a cry of surprise and rage combined, and started as if he would rush from the place to avoid her; but Boghaugh rising seized him with both hands, restraining him—more by his words, however, than by his strength.

"Hoots, man, dinna mak' a fule o' yoursel'. Be sensible and hear what she has to say. Od, man, the blackest loon that ever stood fornenst a bailie has a chance o' explainin' his faut."

"I told her never to come near me again," he said with glaring eyes, but controlling his passion; "but that there may be nae blame on me, I'll listen to what she has to say."

"It'll no tak me lang to tell or you to hear," she said firmly,

although her bosom was swelling with emotion. "Ye blame me that I didna tell ye Jeamie had come to see me. I didna do't because I wished to wait till I could speak o' him without gieing you the pain o' thinking that I cared mair for him nor a wife should dae."

"Ye hear her," he interrupted wildly. "She owns hersel' that she could nae speak o' him as the wife o' another man should."

Her cheeks burned, and her lips trembled, but her voice was steady.

"Ye ken'd whan I married ye that I lo'd him, and that I never would hae been your wife if I hadna believed him dead—I didna mean to mind ye o' that," she added hastily as she saw him writhe, repenting the cruelty of the words, "but ye hae forced it frae me."

"Say what ye like, I can bear't," he answered, attempting to sneer in order to cloak the violence of his agitation.

"If ye had said a word to me about him, I would hae told ye everything; but ye never said that word, although ye had heard that he was hame. I didna speak; for that day when he cam' in by to Cairnieford, him and me parted never to meet in this world again, as we thought."

"And nae doubt ye had nae expectations o' seeing him at Askaig when ye gaed there yesterday, taking your claes wi' ye and everything ready as though ye didna mean to come hame again?"

"I didna think o' him ava when I was gaun to Askaig. A man cam' to the house wi' a message frae you, as he said. He told me that you had been up at Askaig, that ye'd had a quarrel wi' Jeamie Falcon, and that ye'd got yoursel' sair hurt, and maybe woudna be able to come hame. Sae I was to gang to ye at ance, and bring things wi' me for you and for mysel', lest we shouldna be able to leave the place. He had the gig waiting at the foot o' the loaning, and I gaed wi' him no doubtin' his word."

"Wha was the man?"

"I dinna ken him."

"Had ye ever seen him afore?"

"No, that I mind, although his face and voice didna seem strange to me. I wasna suspecting a lee, and I was ower muckle ta'en up wi' what he said about you to think onything about him."

"Sae ye couldna tell us wha the man was?"

"No."

Robin gave vent to a harsh mocking laugh that grated on the ears of the others, and seemed less like the kindly-hearted man he had always hitherto shown himself than almost anything he had yet said or done.

"And do ye think a man in his senses is to believe that story?" he cried contemptuously.

"Aye, you would believe me if ye were in your senses, Robin Gray," she said, flushing under the smart of his scorn, and her temper getting the better of her sorrow; "but ye're possessed o' some evil spirit that maks everything ye hear sound false as your ain suspicions are. Lord help ye, man, I maist forget my ain pain in pity o' ye."

"Thank ye. Was that a' ye had to tell us?"

"No yet. I gaed wi' the man to Askaig. When we got there, naebody was in the house. I was surprised at that, and he said he couldna understand it. But he tauld me to sit doon in the room and no to steer, and he would find out where ye was. He gaed awa' and he didna come back again. But I noticed this—that the gig was Clashgirn's, and nae doubt the Laird 'll be able to tell ye wha the man was that had his gig."

"Oh, I can tell that without his help. It was just a man sent by Jeamie Falcon."

"I'll no believe that; he wouldna be guilty o' sae base a trick on me. I blamed him for't when I was driven wud wi' your abuse, but I'm sorry for't noo."

"Nae doubt it was a' the doing o' the man ye didna ken."

Without heeding the cruel jibe she went on.

"I waited about twa hours, as near as I could guess, when Jeamie Falcon cam' in wi' Wattie Todd. He was as muckle put out at sicht o' me as I was at sicht o' him. He told me

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that ye had been there the day afore speirin' for him, but no that day ; and he jaloused that Clashgirn had something ado wi' the gowk's errand I had been brocht on. I wanted to get hame at once, and we gaed doon to the water. But a' the while I had been waiting the rain had been fa'ing, and the spate rising sae that it was impossible to win across the burn."

" Yet I got across an hour after that."

" And the crossing has cost the horse his life. Oh, man, if I had ken'd that it would hae satisfied ye I would hae loup'd into the water and been carried hame as Brown Jock was."

She paused, hastily wiping away the tears which had forced themselves to her eyes, and repressing the sobs that were choking her.

" Gae on, Jeanie," said Adam stiffly, but taking her hand with the simple confidence of a child.

Again his trust touched her and strengthened her.

" We gaed back to the house to wait for Rob Keith, who was awa' seeking ane o' the beasts that had been lost. We thocht that he might be able to find some way o' getting me across, although it was quite dark then. I was greeting wi' the fear o' no being able to win hame that nicht, but I never thocht that even if that had happened ye would hae shamed me and belied me as ye hae done. Ye cam' and ye] ken what happened syne, except that Jeamie gaed awa' jist after yoursel', saying that we would never see him again. I went out to see if there was nae way o' getting hame in spite o' a' the storm. I tint the road, and got on to the Brownie's Bite."

She paused : then looking steadily at him she added very slowly—

" I saw something there—" (Aye ! he started)—" that frichted me. You cam' across me, and I fainted. I dinna come to mysel' till this mornin', and as soon as Rob Keith could get a horse and cart through the water I came hame. That's a' I hae to tell."

The simple earnestness of her manner was the best witness of her truth. But the man was blind still. The conviction of

of his jealousy was too strongly impressed upon his mind to be removed by the mere assertion of her honesty. No, he was not blind—he was worse than blind, for everything that came within his vision was distorted into the vilest falsehood. And yet he loved her madly; his heart was aching and warming to clasp her to it!

"And every word ye hae spoken I believe to be true in sicht o' Heaven," said Adam.

"And I believe it to be false," said Robin fiercely—all the more fiercely because it pained him so.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### WHICH IS TO BLAME?

"Cauld is the blast upon my pale cheek,  
But caulder thy love for me O,  
The frost that freezes the life at my heart  
Is nought to my pains frae thee O!"—*Burns.*

"FATHER, father!" was all that Jeanie could exclaim when her husband made that cruel declaration of his disbelief.

She flung her arms round Adam's neck, and laying her head on his breast gave vent to the sobs and tears she had with so much difficulty repressed whilst she had been explaining her conduct.

Boghaugh had been scarcely less impressed with the truth of Jeanie's statement than her father had been; although, all the circumstances considered, it did seem strange that she should have gone to Askaig, where she knew Falcon was living, on the mere assertion by a man of whom she knew nothing, that her husband was lying there injured when she had seen him start as usual for the market. He did not, and indeed could not, make sufficient allowance for the silent suspense the wife had been enduring for a week previous, and which, to her mind, rendered an angry encounter between her husband and Falcon only too probable.

He was, however, as mentioned, ~~impressed~~ by the statement,

that ye had been there the day  
that day ; and he jaloused that  
wi' the gowk's errand I had  
get hame at once, and we gaed  
while I had been waiting the  
spate rising sae that it was impo-

" Yet I got across an hour ago—

" And the crossing has cost me  
I had ken'd that it would be  
louped into the water and be  
was."

She paused, hastily wiping away  
themselves to her eyes, and  
choking her.

" Gae on, Jeanie," said Adam,  
with the simple confidence of a child.

Again his trust touched her.

" We gaed back to the house  
was awa' seeking ane o' the boats,  
thocht that he might be able to  
across, although it was quite dark.  
the fear o' no being able to win.  
thocht that even if that had hap-  
pened to me and belied me as ye hae done  
happened syne, except that Jeanie  
sel', saying that we would never  
to see if there was nae way o'  
storm. I tint the road, and go.

She paused : then looking slowly—

" I saw something there—  
frichted me. You cam' across  
come to mysel' till this mornin'.  
could get a horse and cart to  
That's a' I hae to tell."

The simple earnestness of her words  
of her truth. But the man who

him, and maddened him into spurning her from him as false and unworthy of that affection he had lavished on her, and which rendered her falsehood all the more culpable.

Again there was a medium condition of his frenzy during which he was apparently calmer. He contracted his brows and pressed his head with his hands, trying to compel his thoughts to move in steady sequence—trying, as he had done on that night when the Laird had warned him of Falcon's return, to look the matter fairly in the face, and see what course common sense and kindness indicated to him. In that humour he had decided upon leaving Cairnieford in charge of Adam for her benefit and for her sake, and to go away somewhere that he might be amongst people who knew nothing of the disgrace he imagined he had sustained, and amidst scenes which would not add to his misery by constantly reminding him of her.

Decision in the worst extremity affords a certain degree of composure; an exhausted body and a mind without hope produce a languor which is akin to quietude.

He had reached this state when first Adam's contradiction and then Jeanie's appearance had stirred the winds of his passion into all their former fury, rendering him deaf alike to the promptings of his better self and all that she had said. The idea of her falsehood had become so firmly fixed in his mind by the tortures of the preceding night that it could only be uprooted by proofs much stronger than any he had yet received—proofs that should strike like pickaxe and spade.

Still, during the pause which ensued, writhing at sight of her distress, he pressed his head between his hands, trying to view the matter dispassionately.

“Ye're no the man I took ye to be,” at length said Adam, harshly; “an' it's a doom's black day for me that I maun feel mysel' behunden as I am to the man wha could speak as ye hae dune o' my dochter. By the Lord, if I had the use o' my arms as ance I had, I would hae broke every bane in your body for half as muckle.”

“Whisht, father, whisht,” interrupted Jeanie, drying her

eyes ; “ there’s nae use speaking that way ; it can do nae guid, and ye hae mair need to pity him nor to be angry wi’ him, for he’ll rue a’ that he’s said and dune sairly afore many days are by. God help him.”

Her sobs were stilled now and her eyes were dry as she cast a look of sad compassion on the man.

“ I maun say, Cairnieford,” broke in Boghaugh gravely, “ that ye seem unreasonable. I never like to meddle atween man and wife, but I maun say that I think you’re wrang.”

“ Aye, God help me,” he said bitterly, “ since ye are a’ against me, and Guid forgie me, woman, if I hae wrangled ye. O, Jeanie, I would be proud to hae the tongue that has spoken your shame brunt out o’ my mouth if I could only feel that ye hae told the truth.”

She had been touched by the anguish of his tone as he had begun to speak, but the finishing words stung her.

“ What hae I ever done,” she exclaimed indignantly, “ that ye canna believe but I’m telling lees ? ”

“ Ye hae hidden frae me that he had come back, and ye hae told me—though no sae many days syne ye said ye never would—that ye wished ye had never been my wife.”

“ And ye drove me to’t wi’ your crnel words. Aye, and ye mak’ me feel noo that I am still sorry, for it would hae been happier for us baith if I had held to what I felt to be richt and never joined my hand wi’ yours. Heaven forgie you for makin’ me feel’t, and Heaven forgie me for doing sae, but ye hae said eneuch this day to mak’ me wish amraig I had gane awa’ wi’ Jeamie Falcon last nicht.”

A violent spasm distorted his features for a moment, and then he cried hoarsely—

“ Ye hear her, Boghaugh—ye hear her, Adam ? —(to her)—That will do, ye needna say ony mair.”

“ I didna mean to say ony mair ” (firmly and with flashing eyes)—“ at least I mean to say nae mair to you. A man that is sac ready to snap at ony word that could cast shame on his ain wife s no the man to do her justice, though an angel was to come doon to him and gie him assurance o’ her honesty.”

"I hae tried to do my duty by ye—"

"And I hae never failed in mine. But it ends a' here, and even to the end I hae done my duty in trying to satisfy ye that I am an honest woman, sair to thole though it has been to think that I could hae been doubted. But the last word that I will ever speak to defend mysel' frae the charge o' a sin I never was guilty o' in thocht or deed has been spoken noo. Though I leave your house this day, I can haund my head up proud amongst a' folk, for it is by nae fault o' mine that ye gang forth a shamed man. They wha ken me will hand me blameless, and for others I need care naething."

There was a simple dignity in her manner that brought him more to his proper senses than anything she had yet said.

"Only speak ae word," he exclaimed; "tell me where I may find the man that came for ye wi' the gig, and I will believe that I am wrang."

"I hae told ye a' that I can tell ye, and it has been the whole truth, as Him wha sees and hears a' things kens. Ony mair ye want to learn ye maun get frae others, I hae naething mair to say. But for the many kindly things ye hae done for me and mine, I gie ye thanks, in spite o' a' that's passed, and I will ay think tenderly o' ye as what ye were afore this cam' aboot, for I hae a reason stronger even than my gratitude to wish ye had ay been what you were then."

"Ye will gie me nae proof?"

"I hae nane to gie but what I hae gien already."

"And ye shouldna hae needed mair," said Adam in his stiff dry way; "but there's nae use trying to gar the blind see. We'll leave your house this day, and while we have hands we winna be behauden to ye for onything."

"Ye'll do as ye think best," retorted Robin, angry with Jeanie, with her father, and most of all with himself, whilst doggedly holding to his belief that he had been wronged in purpose, if not in fact, and miserable in the thought that the whole world was against him. "I'll arrange wi' Carnegie, the writer, so that the woman that bears my name shall never need to want."

"I will hae naething frae ye sae lang as I can work for mysel'. We needna bide here ony langer, faither; a' that need be said is said."

"There's just ae word, and that is to tell ye, Cairnieford, that my arm is nearly richt again, and wi' Heaven's will I'll work day and nicht to pay ye back every bawbee that we owe ye."

"Hoot, toot," ejaculated Boghaugh; "auld folk and young folk are a' gane wud, I think. This is no the way to part. Come, come, Cairnieford, just say ye hae been wrang, and that ye'll think nae mair about this daft habble; and ye, gnuid-wife, just help him ower the slap and gie him your hand."

It is possible that Robin would have yielded to the reconciliation at that moment, for the resolution which Jeanie's bearing expressed had fallen like a cold shower on his distracted thoughts, and enabled him to realize the idea that the treasure he had valued so—and still valued—was slipping from his grasp for ever, when one word from him might save it. But Jeanie herself interposed.

"Na, Boghaugh, wise and kind though your counsel be, I can never gie him my hand again till I hae proof that his mind is as free frae a' doubt o' me as it was on the day we were married. I would wrang him and mysel' baith to do't; and I winna hae a patch where there has been nae rent."

"She shall never gie him her hand again wi' my will, though he should gang doon on his knees till her, and beg her to forgie him," said Adam stoutly, and drawing her toward the door.

Robin's head was bowed, and his hands hung listlessly by his sides.

On the threshold she looked back, and then, releasing herself from her father, she returned quickly to her husband.

"I canna gang awa," she said in a tremulous whisper, "without telling ye that I never ken'd how muckle I cared for ye till the noo when we are parting, maybe never to see ane another or speak a kind word again. But it maun be; *for your sake and mine, we'll be better apart.*"

He made no reply; indeed he could not, for his voice failed him.

She quickly touched his cheek with her lips and then ran out of the house stifling an hysterical sob.

Robin leaned his shoulder against the wall, groaning.

"Deevil tak' it," muttered Boghaugh, apparently exasperated beyond measure, "it clean dings a' I hae ever seen that twa folk as fond o' ilk other as can be will make their lives miserable just because ane o' them hasna courage to say forgie and forget."

The old man shook his grey hairs and struck the ground impatiently with his staff, forgetful of all his caution. Then, as if struck by a new idea—

"I'll cry her back."

Robin raised his hand to stay him.

"No," he said huskily, "it'll dae nae guid; better let her gang."

"But this'll never dae—ye maun come to a richt understanding."

"I see nae way o' bringing it about."

"Weel, ye'll come hame wi' me the nicht, and after ye hae had a guid sleep your head will be clearer and maybe ye'll be able to see then."

"Very weel, I'll follow ye; but I'm gaun owerby to Clash-girn first."

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### GIRZIE'S BEQUEST.

"He strays among the woods and briers,  
Or in the glens and rocky caves,  
His sad complaining dowie raves."—*Burns*.

FOR two hours after Boghaugh had departed Robin remained in the house alone. What melancholy musings were his during that space; what spasms of pain; how many resolves hastily adopted and as hastily rejected!

All these resolves, however, were directed toward one object;

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to clear up what appeared to be so inexplicable in Jeanie's statement, namely, who had been the man who had brought the false message from Askaig, and what had been his motive in doing so; or rather, who had been his employer, for without doubt the man had acted merely as a servant.

There was a distinct clue to start with in the fact that the gig had been that of Clashgirn.

"If this be ane o' Nicol McWhapple's tricks to fule me, by the Lord aboon it'll be the dearest bit o' knavery he has ever played," he muttered moodily with clenched teeth.

Somehow the bitterness of his wrath seemed to have turned from Jeanie on finding another object upon which to vent itself. He thought of her tenderly, and that kiss upon his cheek had been more potent to soothe him than all the drowsy syrup of the East could have been. Those last words of hers were more precious to him in his sorrow than all the dearest memories of his life.

And yet he winced whenever he thought of Falcon, became bitter and jealously angry: unreasonable, he admitted it was, seeing that when he had married her, he had done so with her confession fresh before him that her heart was Falcon's. But then he had not speculated on the possibility of his return; and he had speculated largely on winning her from his memory all to himself. He had devoted his whole energies to the task, and had fancied that he was succeeding—nay, knew that he was succeeding, when the old love rose from the dead and everything went wrong.

When his irritation was rapidly rising into a new frenzy a voice at his elbow whispered—"I never ken'd how muckle I cared for ye till noo," and the words acted as a charm, frightened away his evil thoughts as the crucifix was said to scare away the foul fiend himself.

Girzie returned. She was dourly silent, and moved about the house in a quick nervous way. She had been up to Askaig and obtained confirmation of Jeanie's intelligence concerning Wattie, so far as Rob Keith was able to confirm it; for he had been out when Falcon and Wattie had quitted the

house. She had gone to several places where she had thought it possible Wattie might have staid during the night; but she could obtain no information concerning him anywhere, and now she was preparing to start in pursuit.

Robin had waited for her in the expectation of learning from her something relative to the man of the gig.

"Hae they fee'd ony new men at Clashgirn?"

"No that I ken o' or hae heard o'; they hae just the same loons they had at hairst."

Her answers to all his queries were short, sharp, and chiefly consisted of "I dinna ken." She was preoccupied and even surly, far too busy with her preparations, and too anxious about her son, even to ask one question as to the result of Jeanie's interview, much as she had been interested in the matter previously.

He was moving to the door before he observed the peculiarity of her manner. His attention was attracted by the sight of an old-fashioned bonnet which she had produced from some receptacle under the bed, and which she hastily donned, tying the faded ribbons under her chin with nervous fingers. He could not help being struck by her appearance in this huge headgear, in which he had never seen her before, so far as he could remember.

Then he noticed how the thin lips were compressed, and the sharp features were drawn together as if with pain. His hand had always been ready to help the sorrowing, and at present his own misfortune made him keenly sympathize with that of others.

"Is there onything wrang, Girzie?" he said, regarding her through the mist of his own troubled thoughts.

"A hantle ower muckle wrang, my certie," she said sharply, and with a toss of her head as she gave the bow she had tied a finishing jerk. She felt somehow as if he were in a measure to blame for Wattie's escapade; "ye needna think, Cairnieford, ye hae gotten a' the sorrow o' the world to yoursel', for there's a ween o't cam' to my gate."

"But what is't?"

"Wattie, the gomeril, has gane awa' wi' Jeamie Falcon,  
and Guid kens what'll befa' my puir bairn—the deil's in him,  
wha would ever hae thocht o' him playing sic a cantrip?"

And, alternately ready to give vent to wild lamentations and angry outbursts, with the acute grief she was really suffering hidden by her exclamations of vexation, she continued her preparations.

"And what are ye gaun to dae?"

"Gaun to seek him wherever he is—wha kens but the puir daft creatur' may hae got among strangers wha'll just torture the sowl out o' him wi' making a fule o' him—or wha kens but he's maybe deeing at some dykeside, starved and cauld and friendless, for Jeamie would be sure to send him hame, and that's what I dread maist. Lord guide him—but wait tell I get a hand o' him. I'll learn him to gae dancing after folk that dinna want him, and hae nae way o' daeing wi' him though they did. I'll gar him dance till anither tune, leaving me in sic a state about him—my puir bairn, my puir witless, helpless bairn, God guide ye wherever ye be."

Her voice was husky and broken, and there were tears in her eyes, across which she immediately drew the back of her hand with an angry "hoots."

"I wish I could help ye, Girzie; is there naething I can do for ye?"

"Na, thank ye, Cairnieford, there's nougnt ye could dae except help me to seek him, and that ye canna; but there's nae need; I ken weel eneuch the road they hae ta'en, and I'll find him."

"Do ye no want ony siller? Ye dinna ken what ye may hae to spend."

"Na, I dinna want that either. I hae a pickle o' my ain that I hae been gathering for ten years past, sae that whan I'm ta'en to my lang hame Wattie michtna be just a'thegither unprovided for. It's no muckle, but I hae scrimped mysel' sair mony a time no to break on't because it was for him, and because I ken that wi a' the loon will hae a hungry wame mony a day. I maun break on't noo; but it's on his account, ye see, and that's different."

"Dinna break on't yet, Girzie; keep it for him, and I'll gie ye five notes——"

"I'll no hae a penny o't. Gie it to him when I'm awa' gin ye like, or gie me an extra penny for the fish when I ca' on ye; but I'll hae nane o't enoo. Eh, man, I'll be proud and willing to work to make up the store again, if I only had him safe here; but I dinna ken what for, or what way, my mind misgies me that I'll never see my Wattie hame ony mair, and that's the reason I'm sae ready to break on his siller."

"There's nae fear but ye'll find him. Dinna let that thought get the better o' ye."

"Hoot, aye, it's just an auld wife's clavers, I ken; yet afore ye gang, Cairnieford, and since ye want to help me, will ye promise that, gin onything should gae wrang wi' me, and he come hame, will ye promise that ye'll be a friend to him?"

"There's my hand on't, he shall not want a friend while I'm to the fore."

"That's gien me mair heart, nor your five notes would hae dune. Do ye see this stane?" (laying her hand on one at the back of the chimney, black with soot).

"Aye, what's there?"

"That's my bank; howk oot the stane when the time comes, and ye'll find a' that I hae to help Wattie when I can help him nae mair."

"I'll mind, Girzie; but I'll no need to do your bidding for mony a lang year yet."

"I houp no, but onyway I'm easier in mysel' noo that I hae settled a' thing."

Having in this simple fashion made her will, and placed her affairs decently and in order, as became a person about to venture forth on a journey the end of which she could not foresee, Girzie was ready to start.

Robin left her arranging with her neighbour about the care of Dawnie the cuddly, and set out on his own journey to Clashgirn. The evening was dark and windy, with heavy clouds sweeping rapidly across the sky; occasionally in their kaleidoscope changes permitting a few pale stars to glimmer on the earth.

He proceeded at a rapid pace, notwithstanding the stiffness of his joints and the unusual heaviness of his limbs, resulting from the fatigues he had undergone since the last night, and from having permitted his wet clothes to dry on him. But by the time he reached Clashgirn the joints had become supple again, and he felt little of the fatigue he had been unpleasantly sensible of in starting.

This relief freshened his mind as well, and prepared him for what he anticipated would be a hot encounter with the Laird.

"If he wasna a cripple toad, there would be some satisfaction in shaking the worthless life out o' him," he muttered with clenched teeth as he advanced to the door.

There was a light in the Laird's room, as a chink in the shutter revealed. So he knocked loudly, knowing that his man was at home.

An unnecessary length of time seemed to elapse before any one answered the summons, and he was on the point of knocking again, and more imperiously, when the door was opened by Mrs. Begg. The good woman looked flustered, and was evidently out of temper about something.

After briefly saluting her, he asked for McWhapple.

"'Deed an' I dinna ken whether ye'll get to see him the nicht or no," she answered with a toss of her head and a short laugh, both of which were intended for signs of contempt for her master; "he's been in aye o' his tantrums since morning, when we had twa or three words, and what ever he's been doing, whether he's been countin' his ill-got gowd or what, I canna say, but he hasna let ony aye in this house see the inside o' his room the whole day."

"He'll hae to let me see the inside o't though, or come out to me," said Robin decisively.

"Weel, it's mair nor he would let me or ony aye else," continued Mrs. Begg, her voice rising as the recollection of the indignity she had suffered was warmed by the narration of it; "he's keepit the door locked a' day, and just ta'en his meat frae the lass at the lintel—no to say that his appetite's ony

the waur for want o' exercise. My certie, no, for he's eaten mair nor eneuch to dae three men wi' ord'nar' stamachs."

"Tell him I'm here."

"I'll dae that for ye, Cairnieford, though he tell't Leezie that if ony aye ca'd he couldna see them the day—as if I wasna the proper person to receive sic instructions, and be tauld the why o't tae. But I's no bide muckle langer in this house to be lightlied by sic a creatur' as him; and maybe when I gang he'll learn that I ken mair o' his goings-on nor he would care for the minister, or his brither elders, or the folk he's been haudin' his heepocritical head up among, to hear o'—my certie!"

She had continued to speak in a high key as she passed down the lobby to the door of the Laird's room, as if desiring him to hear her. Although Mrs. Begg had a temper, she was, as has been already stated, a kindly body, and the prime cause of her quarrel with Clashgirn was her anxiety about Falcon, in consequence of rumours she had heard from Cairnieford.

She knocked sharply at the door, and shrilly announced the visitor.

There was none of the usual unction in the Laird's tone as he replied, not even a note of the martyr-like whine.

"I canna see him or onyboddy the nicht. I'm busy. I'm no weel. I hae got a bad cauld——"

"Hech, an' ye're hoastin' sair," interrupted Mrs. Begg, satirically.

"Gae 'wa, woman, and do as I bid ye. Ask him to ca' the morn, and I'll see him."

"Ye hear?" said Mrs. Begg, turning to Robin, who had followed her and heard part of the Laird's answer.

He now knocked himself.

"Open, McWhapple," he said loudly and authoritatively, "and let me in, or come ye out, for I maun see ye, and that the noo, though I should hae to birze open the door to win at ye."

"Od, it's extraordinar' that a man's to be commanded that gate in his ain house!" exclaimed the Laird; and there was a

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shuffling of stealthy feet on the floor, whilst he spoke—not his feet—as if some one were getting out of the way. “I hae tell’t ye that I canna see ye the noo. Come the morn.”

Robin placed his shoulder against the door.

“If ye dinna open by the time I count five, I’ll ding doon the door.”

And he gave it a rough shake to show that he had the strength to carry out his threat as he began to count slowly, and in a loud voice.

“Od sake, hae ye come to rob an’ murder me that ye threaten to bring my ain house about my lugs? This is a fine way to treat a gentleman, and your Laird (this in an injured tone); ye dinna think I’ll let this forcible entry, which is naething short o’ hamesucken, pass without notice——”

“Four,” shouted Robin, “are ye ready?”

“Od’s my life, bide a minute till I can get across the floor.”

“Five!”

And he gathered his strength to fulfil his threat when the door was flung open, and the Laird stood before him with a candle in his hand, the humble surprise of a sweet-tempered and much-wronged man expressed on his countenance.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### BAD MADE WORSE.

“My doubts are torments waur to thole  
Than knowledge o’ the warst could be;  
Oh, faith ance lost, clouds wrap the soul  
And mar the truth it fain wad see.”—*Anon.*

“ANITHER minute and there would hae been a job for smith and carpenter, and aiblins the doctor tae, if ye’d been ower near,” said Robin, as coolly as if this had been quite an ordinary method of soliciting an interview.

“Weel, Cairnieford, I must say that though, as a rule, I’m ay glad to see ye, and pleased to bid ye welcome to my house,

your conduct on the present occasion is o' that nature that would gar me think ye had been taking mair drink nor was guid for ye, if I didna know ye better, and certainly it becomes you so much the less to behave in this manner, seeing that you are quite sober."

The Laird spoke in his best English, as was his custom on all occasions when his dignity was concerned; but it was the tone of a man who, whilst feeling himself aggrieved, is yet sorry to say so, and is open to be convinced that he has made a mistake. But his eyes blinked inquisitively and watchfully behind the candle he held up to examine the visitor, and by that means the back part of the room was thrown into complete shadow.

His appearance was peculiar. Robin had never seen him otherwise than dressed with the sleek precision of a dandy, although always plainly, as became a man of serious thought. At present his clothes were disarranged, his shirt-frill, usually so well starched, and causing Mrs. Begg more anxiety than all the other duties of the house combined, was flabby and snuffy, as if he had been wearing it all night and day; and his thin hair looked as if it had not been brushed for a couple of days.

His face, always sallow, was sallower than ever now, and his peering eyes seemed to be smaller and more sunken. They blinked uneasily.

"Am I to come in, or are you to come out, or are we to speak here?" was Robin's answer to the Laird's neat address.

"Aweel, since you're here, and since you will speak wi' me, you can come in and take a seat. And you can get some hot water, Mistress Begg, and maybe Cairnieford will take a glass o' toddy."

At this hint Mrs. Begg tossed her head, and flounced off to the kitchen, whilst Robin entered the chamber, and the Laird closed the door.

The room was in as much disorder as the owner's dress. The chairs were out of their places, the table was drawn up close to the fire, and was covered with a number of account-books and a variety of documents, except at one corner,

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which was occupied by a bottle and a glass. On the floor beneath the window had been placed the tray containing the dishes and the remains—a bone picked very bare—of the Laird's dinner.

"Ye see I hae had a busy day wi' my accounts," he explained apologetically, and pointing to a seat; "I hae been letting them get behindhand, and I was trying to make up for lost time. I'm obliged on these occasions to keep the door fast, or that woman, Mistress Begg, would be for ever upsetting my calculations wi' her extraordinar' tongue, which begins ringing at six o'clock in the mornin' and keeps on ringing till ten or eleven, or maybe twelve o'clock at night. She canna even gie it a rest while she's taking her meat, but maun keep clatterin' on as for a wager how muckle she could say in a day."

He had been regaining his customary composure and meekness whilst giving this information, and a large pinch of snuff completed the restoration. He tendered the box to his visitor in the manner of peace-offering, and to indicate that his martyr-like nature had already forgiven the violence by which the audience had been obtained.

Robin thrust the box from him impatiently.

"I'm sorry to hae interrupted ye in your interesting occupation," he said drily, "but I had no time to put off, and I ken'd that your kindly heart would excuse me, when ye ken'd that you had it in your power to relieve my mind o' a weight o' trouble."

The Laird gave him a quick glance of suspicion, as if to ascertain whether or not he were mocking him.

"I'm sure I would forgie a heap mair nor you have done, Cairnieford, if I thought I could serve you in onyway," he answered meekly.

"Then, tell me, when did you last see James Falcon?"

Robin fancied,—but the movement was so slight that he could not be certain that it was anything more than fancy,—that McWhapple started and shivered, whilst his eyes glanced toward the door of the inner chamber—his bedroom. It was so quickly over, however, and his reply was so much in his

usual tone and manner that the matter made no impression on Robin.

"Od, it's extraordinar'!" (another pinch of snuff and strong nasal accompaniment) "I think a' body's gane wud about Jeanie Falcon, and a' body thinks I keep him tied to my coat-tail, for it's ay here they come speirin' for him; and if he'd been Lord John o' the Highlands he couldna hae mair anxious inquiries about him."

"When did you see him last, I was speirin'?"

"Oom, let me see" (meditatively) "hoot, aye, I mind; it was on Monday; he sent ower in the forenoon to ask me to lend him a horse as he was going to Ayr to see when there would be a vessel sailing south, and as I had a bit business in the town concerning the purchase of a new brig, I just took the gig and drove ower wi' him."

"Ye haena seen him since?"

"Na" (shaking his head).

"Then it was you who sent the gig to Cairnieford yesterday?" (quickly and inclining towards his interlocutor.)

"Me? What for?"

"To take my guidwife to Askaig."

A pause, during which the Laird's eyes blinked with apparent astonishment; then making a dab with his head—

"In the name o' guidness what would I do taking your wife to Askaig, where she would be sure to meet the very man she would maist avoid?"

"Ye needna try to hide it frae me," said Robin desperately, assuming confidence which he could not altogether feel; "I ken a', and it was you that sent for her, you that sent the leeing message, and a' that ye might hae your spite out against me."

"Whatna message?"

"Ye ken weel; the message that me and Falcon had been quarrellin' and that I'd got mysel' hurt."

"Who told you that?"

"Hersel', for wi' a' your wiles, and his too maybe, she came hame again."

"And ye believe it was me that got her carried to Askaig—me that was the first to warn ye that Jeanie had come hame, that he'd seen your guidwife, and counselled ye to look after her?"

That was a stab sharp and deep.

"Aye, you whose leeing tongue was the first to pooshin' my mind against her, the first to make me doubt her and ready to believe that she was guilty—she wha is as pure as ye are foul. You did it a'—you ha'e driven me out o' my judgment and caused me to gar her rue the day that we were married. But I swear to ye that if ye dinna confess the whole truth afore I leave this room ye'll sup sorrow wi' a big spoon afore I'm done wi' ye."

His passion had got the better of him again, and instead of meeting cunning with cunning as he had at first attempted, he had unbared his purpose and his suffering in that outburst.

The Laird folded his hands on his knees with the silver snuff-box under them, sighed and looked the picture of injured friendship.

"I didna mean to say a word on the matter, Cairnieford," he began submissively; "but since ye put me to it in self-defence it is necessary that I should speak."

"Out with it, then."

"I'll begin by telling ye that I hae had word o' a' that happened at Askaig yestreen frae Rab Keith; and my opinion is, James Falcon, wha, I'm glad to say is making his way out o' the country by this time, is a young villain that I would hae basted wi' my staff had I came across him kenning what I ken noo. As for your guidwife——"

"Weel, what about her?"

"I'll no say what about her."

"Say an ill word o' her, and I'll thrapple ye, by heaven."

And he sprang up grasping the little man's throat so tightly that it seemed probable he would choke him whether the words were spoken or not.

"There, man, there," gasped the Laird, trying to unfasten the giant's grip; "od, I said I wouldna say onything about

her, and ye lay hands on me as though I'd been misca'ing her up hill and down."

"Gang on," growled Robin, resuming his seat, and none the better pleased with himself that he had shown such poor control over his temper.

The Laird took a few minutes to recover his breath and his snuff-box, and to arrange his cravat, which had been displaced. Then—

"I wouldna take this treatment at onybody's hands, in my ain house especially, if it weren't that I ken in what distress o' mind ye are, and pity you."

Another sting which made the man wince : the sneering pity of this contemptible creature was harder to bear than the scorn of an honest man.

"Gang on, will ye? Curse ye."

"That's no civil, to say the least o't; and onybody but me would just show ye to the door. But I canna feel it in my heart to be stiff wi' ye in your present state. Weel then, Jeamie Falcon got the loan o' the gig yesterday, for what purpose I didna ken, or he'd never hae had it. My opinion noo is, that whether your guidwife was a party to the arrangement or no—and I'll no say a word ae way or other on that score—he was meaning to take her awa' wi' him and sail for the south in the vessel that he ken'd was to start the day. No doubt the storm delayed them at Askaig, and ye came upon them and frightened ane or baith o' them sae that they didna carry it out."

"What man was't that drove the gig?"

"It was my man Morris took the gig up by to Askaig and left it there. I'll send for him, and ye can question himsel'."

He went to the door and called Lizzie several times. The girl at length answered him, and he bade her send Morris to him.

The man entered the room a few minutes afterwards. He was a tall gawky-looking fellow, whom Robin, to his knowledge, had never seen before. He had a dull sleepy face and heavy eyebrows. In answer to Robin's questions, he stated

that he had taken the gig as far as the ford at Askaig, and there he had been met by Falcon and another man whom he did not know. He had relinquished the gig to Falcon and walked home. That was all he knew.

"What was the man like who was with Falcon?" queried the Laird.

"A chiel' about my ain height, wi' a jacket that had a blue striped breast."

"Would ye ken him again?"

"Brawly."

"That'll do, Morris; thank ye."

The man quitted the room with a degree more of alacrity in his gait than he had displayed on entering, as if he were glad to get away.

Robin sat with his face covered, and the Laird took a self-congratulatory pinch. He was the first to speak.

"Now, ye ken a' that I can tell ye, Cairnieford, and ye'll do me the justice to own that I hae gien ye a' the information in my power, and that I gied ye fair warning, on the very day that I first saw Falcon back again, that there would be fashious work afore ye."

"Aye, ye did that, I own (hoarsely); and I blamed ye for't. I wish I had heeded mair your warning—though it woudna haen mattered muckle either; for I woudna hauid her by me if she wanted to leave me. When did the gig come hame?"

"Och, I forgot to ask that, but I rather fancy it hasna come hame yet. Will I cry him back?"

"No, ye needna heed: I ken a' that I want to ken."

"But ye haena heard yet wha was the man brought the gig to Cairnieford."

"I suppose that it maun haen been the chiel' that your man saw wi' him at the ford."

"No doubt; and I think I can help ye wi' a suspicion o' wha that chiel' was."

"Can ye?" (abstractedly, for he was thinking of another matter).

"Aye; I suspect frae mention of the striped breast of his

jacket that he was the ostler at the Drybrig Inn on the road to Ayr; for I mind that Falcon was speaking wi' him mair nor a quarter o' an hour on the road home on Monday."

"I'll see him the morn if he's still at the place. And noo, I hae just ae thing to say: I'll be gaun away' frae hame the morn, and dinna ken when I may be coming back. Mackie will take charge o' Cairnieford for the present; but ye would take ower the lease if I wanted to gie it up a'thegither?"

"I would do anything to oblige ye," answered the Laird, with difficulty concealing a smirk of satisfaction behind a pinch of snuff; "though I would be loath to lose a guid tenant that's ay had the rent ready to a minute on term-day."

"Thank ye. Guid nicht."

"Take a dram before ya gae, ye're needing it—no. Aweel, shake hands onyway, for I hae ay wished to be a friend to ye, Cairnieford."

"There's my hand for ance, Laird, as it's like to be the last time we'll ever meet in this world, and I hope there's little chance o' us meeting in the next."

"Prejudiced to the last against me," sighed the Laird. "Weel, weel, it canna be helped noo. I wish ye guid fortune wherever ye gang."

"Ye hae a heap o' charity, Laird—on your tongue."

"Kenning my ain faults (humbly), I ay try to be merciful in my judgment o' others."

"That accounts for the quantity o' your mercy."

"Ye're a stubborn body, Cairnieford; there's nae garring ye see straight ance your e'en hae got aglee. But that be a't may, ye'll let me ken if the ostler be the man?"

"Aye, if ye'll let Morris gang as far as the Drybrig wi' me the morn."

"Surely, surely."

"I'll find the man, ye may be certain, ae time or other; and I hope ye may prove as blameless in the matter as ye seem to be enoo."

"Man, what guid would it dae me to breed dispeace atween you and your wife?"

"I am so sorry for you. I am so sorry for the trouble you have had with your husband."

"And we thought it was better to keep him forward with a representation than to tell him the whole truth."

"If I can manage to let you go, I'll see you again," she said with a smile.

It was at this time he presented himself to Dorothea. He was in the most painful of mental agonies—agonies which were to him when first he had learned seemed to confirm Jessie's statement, and yet there was no direct proof that she had been received by Falcon's messenger. His heart yearned for her urgent sum to hasten to her and implore her to forgive all that he had said and done. And his passion exhausted by the over violence and his physical fatigue seemed too weak to contend against the yearnings of his love.

But at the moment when he seemed ready to yield, the sharp sting of jealousy quickened him to the remembrance of Mr. Naugle's influences which he had angrily rebuffed at the time, but which rankled in his mind for all that, and restrained him from the course his heart and reason seemed to point out.

He was in the miserable condition of one who does not know his own mind, and is consequently dissatisfied with himself and everything about him. As one minute he heard Jessie's wild exclamation that she wished she had gone away with Falcon, and he was ready to dance with rage. The next minute her last words were soothing and comforting him, whilst they frightened him with the thought of the terrible wrong he had done her, should it subsequently appear that his frenzy had blinded him to the truth.

It is not easy to realize the torture of his mind, the cause looks so simple. But remember the jealous devotion with which he regarded her, his keen sense of the inequality of their years, his knowledge of her former love for Falcon, and his passionate nature worked upon by a series of unhappy

circumstances and the wily insinuations of the Laird. Then take into account that through it all an upright conscience was groping helplessly about in a mist of passion, craving for the truth that justice might be done, and some idea of the man's anguish will be obtained, whilst his weakness will be pardoned.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## TWO BLACK CROWS.

"There were twa corbies sat upon a tree,  
Sing hey, sing ho, and derry;  
They had picked a dead man's banes clean on the lea,  
And they were as merry as merry could be.  
Sing hey, sing ho, and derry."—*Old Song*.

THE Laird stood tapping his snuff-box uneasily, and blinking at the door for some time after it had closed on Robin Gray. His under lip protruded over the upper one, as if he were sucking it, and his eyebrows were contracted so that his visage was covered with wrinkles. He was in a quandary, and one of an excessively unpleasant character, the upshot of which was anything but clear. He took several pinches, but they did not make the matter any clearer or smooth away a single wrinkle.

Abstractedly, whilst the right hand was arrested half-way to his nose, he rubbed the snuff-box, which was in his left, over his head slowly; but that did not help him either, and whilst losing all patience with the subject of his cogitations, he forgot his grave character as an elder, and uttered impatiently—

"Damn it, and burn it."

"Oich, no, she would shust as soon trink it—pe-tam."

The Laird wheeled about, startled, and beheld Ivan Carrach at the table emptying the glass which had been momentarily arrested by his angry ejaculation, the skipper fancying it applied to the liquor he had been quietly taking.

"At it again—I wish it would burn you; for if it hadn'a

been for your confounded whiskyfied brains, I would never hae been in sic a mess that I kenna how t' get out o't."

"Oich, then, where's the goot o' pothering? If you'll no be able to get out, bide in."

The Laird was in a passion, and his little body quivered with rage. He shook his fist at the obtuse skipper, whose bovine eyes rolled over him with the utmost placidity.

"I hae mair than half a mind to step out o't and leave you to bide in't, ye thick-headed brute."

Carrach was no more disturbed than if a fly had buzzed against his coat.

"No, you'll no be doing that. Ochone, she could never do without you, whether it was here shust trinkin' ta tram, or whether it was in ta jail or on ta gallows. Ochone no, it would never do."

"Will ye hald your tongue, ye senseless blethering fool? Ye'll stand in a' thaes places without me, if ye dinna heed what I say to ye. What business had ye coming out o' that room before I called ye?"

"She'll hear the door was closed, and she'll look out and see there was nopody here, and she'll be dry."

"I might hae guessed that—I believe ye would drink the sea dry, if it had been whisky."

"Cot, but that would be ta fine drunk?"

And his eyes rolled with ecstasy at the bare notion.

By this time the Laird had hirpled back to his chair, and he sank upon it with the manner of one utterly exhausted, his hands hanging listlessly over the arms of the chair, his body bent, and his eyes fixed blinkingly on the skipper, who, in his stolid way, quite undisturbed by the anger or distress of his master, had already sat down beside the bottle, to which he applied himself at brief intervals.

The Laird's outburst of hysterical rage was over, but it had left much petulance behind, which he was at no pains to disguise. As he regarded the man opposite him, he seemed to be envying his dull stolidity, which rendered him so perfectly callous to everything around him.

"I believe if a bombshell was to drap at your foot, Carrach," he ejaculated, "ye wouldna fash yoursel' to step out o' its road."

"She wouldna say," was the indifferent rejoinder.

"Then do ye ken that a bombshell has lighted at your foot?" exclaimed the Laird petulantly.

Carrach rolled his eyes over the floor, and then over his master.

"She'll no see her."

"Maybe ye'll feel her, as ye call it, before long,—mair likely aye than no. Do ye ken what your infernal blundering has earned for you?"

"No but I'll like to hear when I earn onything at all."

"Then it's naething less than a hempen cravat, as sure as I'm sitting here the night."

"I'll no like her; she'll fit too tight."

His stolidity was impenetrable.

A silence fell upon them, during which the Laird reflected, and Carrach continued to drink without the least perceptible effect being produced on him, unless it might be a degree of denser dulness, if that were possible. The bottle being emptied, he shoved it towards his host with a sort of grunt intended as a hint that he would like it replenished. But McWhapple either did not observe or affected not to observe the movement. Another grunt, a little louder and more expressive than the first; and that obtaining no better acknowledgment than the first hint, he declared his wants more plainly.

"Fill her again—she's run dry, and a dry bottle she'll make a dry man, and a dry man—oich, she'll make a sour teil."

The Laird twisted himself in his chair and cast a quick look at his companion, expressive of disgust. He seemed rather disposed to throw the bottle at the skipper's head than to comply with his request. He overcame that desire, however, if he had entertained it, rose with a sigh, and refilled the bottle from a jar, which he produced from the cupboard at his side of the fireplace.

Laying the bottle on the table, he kept his hand firmly on it until he had told Carrach to see if the keyhole was covered, and the latter had rolled over to the door, found the key so turned that it blocked up the only cranny by which a spy could obtain a glimpse of the interior of the apartment, and rolled back to his seat and the bottle.

It should be noted, that despite the Laird's rage he had carefully maintained an undertone in his speech, and the effort had added much to the hysterical character of his manner at intervals. The skipper, too, although apparently too dull to display caution of any sort, had mechanically followed the example of his entertainer, and had spoken in a much lower tone than usual.

The Laird's meditation had two results ; first, it cooled him, and made him more like his ordinary quiet wily self, although there was an underlying trepidation in all he said and did, suggestive that he was seriously troubled—markedly shown in the nervous awkwardness with which he snuffed the candle, extinguishing it. He uttered an ejaculation of chagrin, but made no attempt to relight it. The fire was burning warmly, and reflected a red light on the two men : enough the Laird thought to serve for the present. Second, his meditation satisfied him that his wrath rendered it the more difficult to reach the understanding of his companion, and to make him comprehend the dangers which threatened him or them both.

"Now, Carrach," he said, taking a pinch to settle his nerves, "I'm gnun to be plain with you."

"Oich, that'll be a braw sight ; she'll never know you plain before," interrupted Carrach gutturally.

"Onyway ye'll find me plainer than pleasant for ance in a way. In the first place, then, let me just mind ye o' what ye were when I took ye in hand. Ye were a ragged friendless loon, earning bite and sup among the fishers o' Mull by doing odd jobs, and starving when ye couldna get ony odd jobs to do. I became your friend ; I clad you ; I gied ye a berth in ane o' my boats, and I promoted ye according as I thought your ability and gratitude to me merited, until at last ye became

my right-hand man, and the skipper o' my best brig. Was it no sae?"

"Oich, aye, it was so. I'll be your right-hand man, because there was no one else that would do; and you'll help me because you'll no want me to spoke, and because I'll help you more. You'll begin to help me, no because I was poor and needing, but because I'll come to you and swear I will smash your head and tell the bailies that you was a tam rogue and cheat a poor woman. Oich aye, it was so. I'll mind all very coot—pe-tam."

After this unusually long speech, which was pronounced without the least perturbation, Carrach drained two glasses in rapid succession.

The Laird was decidedly nervous this night, or else his countenance would never have been so contorted as it was whilst he listened. His dismay was not lightened by his surprise that the torpid creature before him should have been able to upbraid him with such disagreeable accuracy. He was, however, quite mild in his reponse—

"Aweel, the ingratitude o' the human heart is something awfu' to behold!" (sighing and blinking). "Here is a man that I hae raised to be the skipper o' my ships frae being a beggar, and he turns on me in my auld age, accusing me o' self-seeking, and helping him for nae other than my ain gain. I thought to imbue ye, sir, wi' a suitable humility by reminding ye o' the past, and I find that ye are mair hardened against a' Christian sentiment nor I ever could hae suspected."

"I'll thocht you'll said you was going to be plain with me?"

"And sae I will; but there's nae use raking up auld scores, for I see they canna affect you in a proper way."

"Aye, but they will affect me--they'll make me wonder what you'll do without me."

"Man, I wish I had never seen ye; I would hae had an easy mind this night."

"That same thocht will come to hersel' some whiles a few. But whan was you to begin to be plain?"

The Laird had another attack of petulance, for he began to feel that the skipper, with all his stupidity, understood him more clearly than he could have imagined his muddled head capable of doing.

"I wish to Heaven you were at the bottom of the frith," he ejaculated sharply.

"I'll be quite sure o' that. Coot, it's beginning to be plain spoke."

"Just haud your jaw and hear what I hae gotten to say. Ye ken that I'm no a man to take ony violent measures that brings ane within the grasp o' the law, when a' my experience and practice tells me that there's nae object in this world ane can wish to reach that canna be reached wi' a bit simple scheming and fair opportunity, which opportunity can ay be found handy by onybody wi' his wits about him. It's wonderful how the bowls row into ane's hand when it's open and ready to catch them. Sooner or later the right bowl comes to the hand that's ready for't, whether it be to help a friend or knock down a foe; and ye hae only to play skilfully to make your ain mark without the possibility o' ony unpleasant rebut, let the aim be discovered or no. That's been my experience, and ye ken that I hae walked accordingly, except on the rare occasions when I hae been fule eneuch to let you hae a word in my plans."

"Aye, you'll make a braw scheme, but when you'll leave me to carry her out, I shust hae to do as things will do wi' me."

"And a fine ado ye hae made for me this last twalmonth. Ye begin by bungling wi' the *Colin*, letting twa folk ken, as weel' as if ye'd told them the whole plan, how the thing was brought about."

"How will I know there was two? There was only one that I'll thocht had a suspicion, and I shipped him out o' the way to China—what more would you'll hae?"

"Aye, and when the second turns up, and when my scheme was working brawly—better nor I could hae expected—ye canna leave things alone to work out their ain strife, but ye

maun interfere and bring a storm about our heads that will only blow by when you're at China or the deevil, I dinna care which, sae that ye never come back here."

" She would shust as soon hae China o' the twa, for the teil, oich, he'll drive most as hard a bargain as you do."

" Then ye'd better get awa' wi' ye afore you're mony hours older, or the deevil will hae ye sooner than ye care for."

" I start this moment directly, if you shust let me have the schooner and five hundred to start me, and you'll never see me no more. I'll never fear all the bailies and all the offishers that was in the world if I was on poard tha schooner."

The Laird hastily relit the candle and turned over the leaves of a ledger which lay at his elbow. He found the page he wanted, gave his spectacles a nervous rub with his handkerchief, placed them on his nose and examined the account before him.

" I canna gie five nor twa hunner either."

" Then she'll shust hae to bide here and be your fery coot friend."

And with the utmost indifferent obduracy he drank another glassful, as if to the continuance of their good fellowship.

The Laird closed his book and closed his lips with a determined snap, as if the end of his endurance had been attained, and he had made up his mind to proceed not one step further. He wheeled about his chair to the fire, and took several pinches of his consolation, as he sometimes designated his snuff. Consolation it appeared to afford him now: for when at length he spoke, it was in quite a friendly way.

" I see we're no like to come to any arrangement, Carrach, and it's a pity after a' the fash I hae had gaeing ower the accounts the day. Sae ye'll e'en take your ain way. Be the consequence what it may, it'll be waur for you nor for me. But mind, it's no my fault that there's nae arrangement come to atween us afore it's ower late. Is the bottle toom again? —I'll no stint ye the nicht, Ivan, for it's my opinion ye'll no drink mony mair bottles here or any other where, unless Auld Nick deals in his ain liquor."

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He refilled the bottle a second time. Then he made himself comfortable before the fire, leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, and occasionally spreading out his hands to warm the palms. His composure was as perfect as the stolidity of his companion, whom his blinking eyes watched cunningly askance.

When the bottle, filled to the neck, was placed before him, Carrach, perhaps for the first time in his life, hesitated to drink. His protruding eyes rolled alternately over the bottle and the Laird, as if his wits were groping after some vague idea that the fulness of the former was associated with the purposes of the latter. His sunflower-like head began to roll like the eyes; and presently his habitual thirst, which rendered him incapable of resisting whisky or brandy wherever he saw it, overcame his suspicions and his caution. He drank.

Silent and watchful sat the Laird, warming his hands. Silent and stubborn, Carrach continued to sip glass after glass, until the bottle was more than half empty, and the candle consumed to within an inch of the socket. Then the sunflower began to roll steadily from side to side, and at length he grunted, a little more gutturally than usual, but that was all—

“What’ll you do then?”

“Me?—nothing.”

“What’ll you give if I’ll go?”

“Oh, there’s nae use saying a word about what I might do, seeing that you’re determined to bide where ye are, unless I do what I canna do.”

“Say your spoke, and then we’ll know.”

The Laird faced him suddenly.

“Weel, I will tell ye what I’ll do: I’ll gie ye the schooner since ye hae taen sic a notion o’ her, and though she cost a heap o’ siller, as ye ken; and I’ll gie ye a hunner pounds forbye, if ye’ll gang awa’, and sign that bit paper there as a receipt.”

“The hunner in gold?”

“If ye like.”

“What’s in the paper?”

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"Just an acknowledgement o' twa or three things that would gie me the power to hand ye ower to the sheriff's officer if ye should ever set foot on this land again."

"Let me see her."

The paper, a sheet of foolscap pretty closely written on both sides, was handed to him. He stared at it vacantly upside down, and in every conceivable position; but he was none the wiser, for his educational acquirements were not extensive enough even to read writing.

"There's a lot o' her," he muttered.

"It's just the form o' thae things."

"When'll she get the siller?"

"The day after the morn."

"Very coot; you'll give me the papers to clear the schooner at the port o' Ayr. I'll bring her up, and lie off the links the night after to-morrow's night. Then you'll bring the siller, and I'll make my cross on the paper like a man. She will, and may she be droont in whisky if you'll ever get the chance o' using her against Ivan Carrach. No—petam."

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### CHAPTER XXX.

#### SCANDAL.

"Preserve us a' ! what shall we do,  
Thir dark unhallowed times?  
We're surely dreeing penance now,  
For some most awfu' crimes."—*J. Robertson.*

ON quitting Girzie Todd's cot, Jeanie and her father had driven slowly away in the cart which had brought them from Cairnieford. At the corner of the road they waited for Boghaugh, and as soon as he joined them started again.

Adam was irritably indignant, uttering repeatedly fretful ejaculations against Robin. Jeanie, on the other hand, was calmer than she had been for a week past. The consciousness that she had done all she could do, all she ought to do, to place

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her conduct in the proper light before her husband, and to dispel his doubts, supplied her with a fortitude which enabled her to look with steady eyes toward the future, now that she knew the worst of the present.

A strong feeling of pride, too, entered into the composition of this fortitude. She had been blamed and scorned without cause ; unmerited reproaches had been heaped upon her until she had been distracted, and the natural reaction had followed. She would prove by the conduct of her life that she had been blameless ; but she would never again stoop to defend herself against a charge so false. However much she might smart under the disgrace of the equivocal position in which she was placed, and the knowledge that the tongue of scandal was busy with her name, she was prepared now to submit to all without murmur. The consciousness of her innocence was like a coat of armour, against which all the slings and arrows of malice would strike harmlessly.

Of her husband she could already think more in sorrow than in anger. She pitied what appeared to her nothing short of wilful blindness in his persistent rejection of the truth, and she would have been glad if she could only have discovered some means of relieving him. But for all that, she was as sincerely determined that their separation should be final as he had been at the moment when in his frenzy he had cast her from him at Askaig.

If sickness or other calamity befell him, she would not refuse to tend him and to give him what assistance she might have in her power to give—this for a sad sweet reason of her own, apart from whatever affection she might bear him—but they should never again dwell together as man and wife. With that conviction had come the calm deep sorrow of a strong nature which accepts the inevitable, and, instead of wasting time in vain regrets, quietly gathers its forces to do the best that may be done under the circumstances.

Adam had declared his intention of quitting Cairnieford that night, and Jeanie had purposed carrying the intention into effect. But she took a more sensible view of what ought

to be done now; and in answer to one of his irritable ejaculations, she said quietly—

“No, father, we canna win awa’ frae the house this night.”

“Hoo?—would ye bide a minute langer than was necessary after what he has said to ye? I’ll no hear o’t.”

“No, father, I’ll no bide a minute langer than is necessary; but ye ken that we daurna shift my mither the nicht when we hae nae place ready to take her to. Besides, I’ll hae to put everything in order at the house, and leave it in charge o’ somebody that winna take advantage o’ the absence o’ the master to waste his goods. I’ll no rin awa’ frae the place as though I was guilty o’ a’ he charges me wi’. I’ll do what his wife should do on his account.”

“Do ye mean ye’re gaun to bide there yet?”

“No (shaking her head sadly); I hae told ye, only as long as may be necessary to put things in order, and to leave them in safety, and until we hae gotten some place for mither.”

“We’ll get our auld house back again.”

“That ye canna see about till the morn.”

Adam grumbled, but Boghaugh interrupted him.

“Seems to me the guidwife takes a plain common-sense view o’ the matter; and it would be still mair in accordance wi’ my idea o’ what she should do, if she was to jist bide in her ain hame until Robin has time to come to himself—for he’s no himself’ enow, or he never would hae said what he has done.”

“I canna do that.”

“Ye sha’na do that—no though I should hae to drag ye out o’ the house by the hair o’ the head,” said Adam sternly. “It shall never be said that while I lived my dochter bode aneath the same roof wi’ a man that has cast black shame on us a’.”

His irritation was made all the keener by the remembrance of his own share in bringing the marriage about. How proud he had been of his son-in-law! how proud he had been of his daughter’s home! And, now that his pride had been humiliated—dragged in the mire as it were—he felt as if he had been personally injured, and was resentful accordingly. It was not so much a comprehension of his daughter’s suffering that

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moved him, as a bitter feeling that he, a man who had walked uprightly in the eyes of his neighbours all his life, was degraded in his old age.

On arriving at Cairnieford, there was another reason discovered for delaying the departure, stronger than any Jeanie had advanced to him. Her mother, who had been excited in the early part of the day by the vague rumours she had caught of what was passing, had been still more affected by the distorted narrative of the events which she had received from the servants since Jeanie had been absent; and she was now so ill that she required all her daughter's attention throughout the night.

They had to send for the doctor, for indeed they began to fear that the shock she had received might prove fatal. He came at a late hour, and his report of her condition was so unfavourable that a new source of alarm was added to Jeanie's already too numerous troubles.

A potion the doctor had administered, by-and-by soothed the invalid to sleep. Through the weary night Jeanie watched beside the bed, obtaining only a few minutes' sleep at intervals on the chair, from which she would start up in the terror of some wretched dream the disturbed state of her mind induced.

When the morning came at last, the patient, who suffered everything with that meek resignation her long illness had cultivated, was better—that is, she was less feverish—but she was still so enfeebled that she could scarcely raise her hand to her head. The doctor had cautioned Jeanie to be very careful to keep every possible cause of excitement away from her; and on that account she dared not tell her that they were to quit Cairnieford. Even Adam, with all his stubbornness, when he looked at the ghastly face of his wife, had not courage to harass her with the account of the misery which had befallen their daughter.

He, however, went off shortly after breakfast to see about the cottage and arrange for its speedy occupation. This he expected would be an easy matter, as it had not been let since he had left it. Rest and reflection had not in any degree

softened the feelings with which he regarded Robin. His sullen wrath was undiminished, and what he heard in the town tended rather to increase his spleen than to subdue it.

The girl whom Jeanie had sent with the cart for Rob Keith's wife had, after discharging her mission, taken advantage of being in the town to call on her acquaintance, Miss M'Claver, the mantua-maker. To her as an interesting secret, the girl had communicated an account of the singular doings at Cairnieford, which were undoubtedly caused by the unlooked-for return of James Falcon. That was enough to enable Miss M'Claver to settle in her own mind all the ins and outs of the story.

"Deed it's nae mair nor I or onybody expekit," she exclaimed with much apparent self-satisfaction in her own foresight; "it couldna be possible that she could hae cared for Falcon or she wouldna hae married an auld man like your maister—though it's no but he's a stout chiel' yet, an' a worthy man. But if she didna care for the puir lad Falcon, then she had been makin' a fule o' him: an' they wha can mak' a full o' ane will be like to mak' a fule o' anither."

"Hech, sirs, but it's ower true," exclaimed the sympathetic domestic.

"But if she did care for her auld lad and yet married Cairnieford, wha could look for onything but that whan the auld love turned up she would be awa' wi' him, let her honest guidman dae what he liked? Sae that, tak' it ony gate ye like, she was fuling a dacent man, and it's just a burnin' shame still. Eh, puir man, what'll he dae wi' a rinawa wife, and no able to marry ony sensible woman that micht console him?"

And Miss M'Claver's virtuous indignation was much heightened by this melancholy view of the case. Whether or not she regretted the loss of the opportunity to prove herself a particularly sensible woman, she took the earliest occasion, which was in about five minutes after her informant had retired, to visit her friend the flesher's wife, and convey to her the intelligence she had just received. Mrs. Gabbock was

interested and horrified, as any faithful spouse might be, at the depravity of the guidwife of Cairnieford. She took Miss M'Claver into the back-shop, and there, assisted by something pleasant to the palates of both ladies, they speculated over the story until they had embellished it with so many of their own surmises as facts, that it turned out of the back-shop very similar to one of Mrs. Gabbock's sausages—containing a great deal of spice to very little meat.

It spread amongst the good-wives of the Port with the marvellous rapidity of all scandal; and, of course, as it spread it gathered fresh colours, so that by morning it had become huge in proportion and as unlike the reality as possible.

By that time it had reached the ears of the minister, and he, knowing enough of the truth to be able to contradict on the spot the general opinion that Jeanie was the most wicked of women, but anxious to learn really how matters stood, and to use his influence as peacemaker, hastened to Cairnieford.

It will be remembered that on the morning succeeding the night Falcon had slept at the manse, when Mr. Monduff discovered the absence of his guest, he had gone out to seek him. His search had led him up the glen, and he had seen Jeanie. She had acquainted him with the resolution come to by Falcon and herself, which he had heartily commended, and there he thought and hoped the affair had ended.

His visit now was most welcome to Jeanie on her mother's account, for nobody possessed more soothing influence over the poor bedstricken woman than the genial minister. Before proceeding to her, however, he inquired what ground there was for the absurd report he had heard.

Jeanie's face crimsoned and then became pallid; the scandal was already out, and the shafts of scorn were already winging toward her. Her weakness endured only for an instant; then she told him all.

"Hoots, guidwife, here's a fine hurley-burley about nothing at all," he said, affecting to treat the matter lightly. "Robin will come to reason when I see him, for I can bear testimony to part of your explanation, and I'm ready to pledge myself

that the rest is as true. Pooh, this is but a bit stubborn anger on his part, and, I'll warrant, if you could only see him this minute he's as vexed with himself about it as you can be."

"Ye needna heed, sir, to say onything to him on my account. I would rather he was left to see things for himself now; for I couldna accept grace when I hae done naething wrang. Though I did hide frae him that Jeanie had come hame, it was through kindness to him."

The minister saw that there was to be stubborn work on both sides; but he did not despair of bringing affairs to a speedy and happy settlement as soon as he could find the guidman. The whole thing appeared so simple to him that he had some difficulty in comprehending how it had grown to such unpleasant proportions—so hard is it for one who has never known the pangs of jealousy to realize its power, which, like a whirlwind of fire, sweeps away reason and love, leaving the heart charred and blackened in its wrath to taint every thought that reaches it.

Mr. Monduff could not feel this, and would have pooh-poohed the idea if anybody had expressed it to him; consequently, he was sanguine of the result of the task which both duty and inclination to serve Mr. and Mrs. Gray thrust upon him.

In spite of Jeanie's grave assurance that the misunderstanding could not be soldered, he was in good spirits when he entered the invalid's chamber. He remained with Mrs. Lindsay an hour, and would have stayed longer only he was eager to start in pursuit of Robin. He left her, however, more soothed by his cheery conversation than she had been by the doctor's drugs.

He was standing at the front door with Jeanie, and was just about to set out to Boghaugh when they saw the lad who had given Robin the information about the gig, and whose name was Willie Boyd, running up the loaning with breathless speed. As he passed round the corner of the house to enter at the back door, the minister noticed that the boy's face had the scared expression of one who has looked on some horrible sight.

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The door of the kitchen was just behind Mr. Monduff and Jeanie, and as it was partially open they presently heard the boy exclaim, pantingly—

“Tam Mackie sent me for a’ne o’ the haps that he brocht up to dry.”

“They’re hanging ower the chair there, but they’re no dry yet,” answered the lass whom the boy had addressed. “What does he want it for—od’s sake, and what’s the matter wi’ the laddie?”

“Eh, it was awfu’.”

“What was awfu’?”

“What I saw.”

“What was’t—can ye no speak?”

“I wasna to say onything about it. I maun rin awa’ back wi’ the hap.”

The announcement that he was to say nothing about what he had seen, as might be expected, quickened the woman’s curiosity.

“Ye’ll no get the hap unless ye tell me what it was ye saw.”

The lad apparently hesitated, for there was a pause. Then he said, lowering his voice—

“They hae found a man drooned in the burn and a’ smashed to bits, and they say it’s Jeanie Falcon. Noo gie me the hap and let me awa’.”

Jeanie and Mr. Monduff heard every word. She with a smothered cry of fright, and startld eyes, clasped her hands tightly on her breast, as if to subdue its convulsive agitation, and staggered back.

The minister saved her from falling, but for the moment he was too much horrified himself to find speech.

“See if it’s true—see if it’s him,” she gasped, and starting away from him she ran into her bedroom, closed and locked the door that none might look upon her agony, the source of which was not sorrow for the dead but terror for the fate of the living.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

## WHAT WAS FOUND IN THE BURN.

"She sought him up, she sought him down,  
She sought the braid and narrow;  
Syne, in the cleaving o' a craig,  
She found him drooned in Yarrow."—*Old Ballad.*

THE minister was alike confounded by what he had heard and by Jeanie's singular conduct. He was recalled to himself by seeing Willie Boyd running away with a coarse horse-rug rolled in a bundle on his shoulder.

He shouted to him. The boy looked back, and immediately halted when he saw who had called him. In answer to Mr. Monduff's inquiries, he repeated his statement, with a few details which increased the minister's horror. He told the lad to run on with the rug and he would follow. Even without Jeanie's request that he would see whether or not the boy's information was correct, he would have been anxious to satisfy himself as to the identity of the drowned man.

"It's sad to think," he exclaimed, "that the poor fellow, after passing safely through all the perils of fire and tempest and sea, should have come hame to perish in this miserable fashion."

And, at his best speed, he continued his way to the spot which the boy—who was already almost out of sight—had described to him.

Young Dunbar had said nothing to his folks at home of his suspicion that there was a man lying drowned in the burn at the cleft rock, chiefly because his companions had laughed at the idea, and partly because Robin Gray was in the house that night.

He had proposed starting early in the morning to satisfy himself on the subject, but had found no opportunity of getting away until the dinner-hour at noon. Then he had walked over to Cairnieford, and in spite of their incredulity, the grieve, Mackie, and the two men who had been with him on the previous night, accompanied him to

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boyish curiosity to know what they were going to do, had followed them.

On arriving at the place, they found the rope secured by the stone as they had left it. Dunbar was the first to advance to the ledge. He dropped on his knees and leaned over. The water in the burn had subsided almost within the limits of its ordinary winter channel. The red sun was shining overhead, but the cleft rock was dark, slimy, and dismal.

The men were still bantering him as to the probability of his finding a blind sow or an old ewe, or maybe a bundle of straw. But the banter was hushed, and their broad grins changed to stupefied stares, when Dunbar raised his head and looked round with a white scared face.

"It's a man," he said in a low voice. "I see his hand sticking out frae aneath the rock."

None of them moved; and Dunbar remained on his knees wiping the cold perspiration from his brow with his cuffs; feeling an almost unconquerable repugnance to look down again to where the Thing lay.

"We'd better try to get him out," said Mackie, the first to recover the use of his tongue, but speaking in a whisper, as they all did afterward, as if they were afraid to wake the dead.

Dunbar glanced shudderingly over his shoulder.

"Aye, but how?"

"Ane o' us will hae to gae down and tether the rope round him."

But who was to go? None of them seemed to have courage enough to venture down into the black hole to drag up a dead man; and so each looked at the other expecting him to volunteer. Then Mackie and the two men behind him turned their eyes on Dunbar, as if agreed amongst themselves that as he had brought about the discovery he was the proper person to complete the work.

Apparently comprehending them, although no word had been spoken, Dunbar rose silently, threw off his coat and placed the end of the rope in the hands of his comrade.

"Keep a ticht hand," he said.

He slipped over the side of the rock and slid down to the bed of the burn. His gorge rose with disgust at the work he had to perform; but he set his teeth firmly, and averting his eyes, doggedly persevered.

He gripped the wrist of the corpse—a cold shiver passed over him as he did so—and drew it out from its hiding-place under the rock. Still keeping his face averted, he passed the rope round the body under the arms and knotted it.

“Hand firm,” he cried to those above, and he climbed to the surface by the rope, hand over hand.

As soon as he had gained his feet, a jerk of his head signalled to the men to hoist up the load. Turning their heads away and in breathless silence they began to pull slowly. It seemed strangely heavy, or their repugnance to the work took the strength out of their arms. They felt the Thing swinging from side to side of the cleft as it rose; they felt it rubbing in a slow heavy fashion against the rock, and nothing but the superstitious awe which was upon them prevented them relinquishing the rope and leaving the task to other hands.

The movement of the tackle was suddenly checked; the body had reached the edge of the rock, and was jammed against it. Dunbar seized the rope short and lifted the burden on to the sward.

As it lay there, an influence—a species of fascination—which overcame his repugnance, impelled him to look at it; and the instant he had done so he sprang back with an ejaculation of horror, covering his eyes with his hands.

“Heavens aboon!” he cried, “it’s Jeamie Falcon, and oh sic a sicht!”

Mackie and the others looked then and shuddered. The body in its course down the stream had been dashed against the rocks until it had stuck fast in the fissure where they had found it, and had been lacerated even more than the horse Brown Jock had been. The face and head were so battered that there was not a feature recognizable, and there was scarcely a particle of hair or scalp left.

Dunbar walked hurriedly down the brae a short distance, and seated himself on the grass with his back towards the spot where the corpse lay, although the rise of the hill would have concealed it from him where he sat, even if he had looked round.

The others followed and stood near him, as if expecting him to say what should be done. He looked up to Mackie.

"Ye had better send ane of the lads for Geordie Armstrong," he said; "he'll ken what to do, for I dinna. Anither had better gang ower to Clashgirn and tell the Laird."

Mackie sent the men off at once, and sat down beside Dunbar. They remained there for nearly an hour without speaking a word. At last Mackie rose.

"It's gey cauld; we'd better move about or we'll get frozen," he said, slapping his hands against his shoulders to warm them.

He caught sight of Willie Boyd; called him and questioned him as to how long he had been there. The boy confessed that he had been lurking about all the time and had heard and seen everything. The grieve told him to go for the rug, cautioning him to say nothing of what he had seen to anybody. The lad departed, and acquitted himself of his errand in the manner already described.

"It's a bad job," muttered Mackie, rejoining Dunbar, who had now risen and was walking about smartly to stir the circulation of his blood.

"Aye, it's a bad job."

And the men; as they walked up and down, regarded each other shyly; for both had said it was a bad job, with a remote sense that the epithet in some way suggested consequences which did not appear on the surface. At any rate, they did not mean that it was a bad job merely because the man had met such a fate, although that was bad and sad enough.

"It would hae been better for him, puir chiel'," said Dunbar, "if he'd never come hame. I wish, noo, I hadna been sae ready to take the huff at him on Saturday."

"Aye, ane doesna like to think o' a hard word spoken to

them that's ta'en awa', especially when they're ta'en awa' yon way."

The man who had been despatched to Clashgirn came back. The Laird was in a "bad way at the news," and was coming directly. Next the man who had gone to the Port for the peace-officer, Geordie Armstrong, returned with the information that they were all to await his arrival, but not to touch the body. Geordie had posted off for the fiscal, and might be expected in the course of an hour.

When Willie Boyd brought the horse-rug Mackie took it, went up to where the body lay, and covered it. That was better, they all thought; for somehow, so long as it had remained exposed, the whole landscape seemed to be affected by the spectacle; and they could not look anywhere without fancying they saw the ghastly form lying before them. Superstition and the awe of death quickened their imaginations, which were dull enough on ordinary occasions; and sometimes the grotesque fancy struck them that the corpse was sitting up looking about and wondering what had happened.

The boy, fearing that he might get a thrashing for having disobeyed the grieve, had said nothing about the minister; but when Mr. Monduff appeared they were all heartily glad to see him, for so long as they had daylight, and the minister with them, they had no fear of any supernatural phenomenon.

Mr. Monduff had scarcely spoken half-a-dozen words when the Laird arrived on his Shetland pony. He was not a popular man; indeed, he was pretty generally disliked by the poorer folk of the country side, and any misfortune which befell him was rather the subject of laughter and uncharitable satisfaction than commiseration. But in the present instance, apart from the sad character of the event, those who looked at him could not help experiencing a shade of pity.

His face was haggard, his eyes sunken, and his lips and hands shaking with nervous excitement. He dismounted, but he seemed too weak to keep his footing, and he leaned heavily on the pony's neck.

"Take my arm, Laird," said the minister kindly; "it's a sore sight you have to look on, but we must bow to His will."

"Thank ye, Mr. Monduff, thank ye, I can walk my lane"—(shivering and leaning heavily on his staff, whilst he gave the reins of the pony to Willie)—"it was just the shock o' the news that upset me; but ye ken that I hae never murmured at the will o' Providence. I hae ay humbly bowed before it, and I do that now."

With this spoken in his meekest tone, he attempted to walk up the hill; but it was evident that the shock had been greater than he wished them to believe. Although he strained every nerve to walk steadily, he staggered occasionally, in a manner which his lameness was not sufficient to account for.

He reached the place, however, without being compelled to seek the assistance he had declined. He shaded his eyes with a trembling hand for a second, as Mackie proceeded to uncover the body.

The minister looked gravely and sadly on the mangled remains of one whom he had liked so well, and who had promised to be so worthy of all his interest. But the Laird uttered a sharp cry of affright.

"Hide it, hide it awa' frae my e'en," he cried, shrinking back.

At a motion of the minister's head, Mackie obeyed; but the Laird stood shivering, leaning all his weight on his staff, and evidently trying hard not to look at the covered heap on the ground, whilst some power stronger than his own will drew his eyes toward it again and again.

They were all sorry for him, except Dunbar, and he was surprised.

"I never expeckit him to take on that gate," he whispered to Mackie; "he never did onything to my kenning to show that he was sae dreadfu' fond o' him when he was livin'."

"Aye, but ane feels it mair when a frien's dead."

"He didna seem to me to feel it ony mair when the news cam' that Jeamie was lost in the *Colin*, although he sneevelled a heap about it tae."

By this time the Laird had partially recovered, and he seized the minister's arm, dragged him down the brae at a slow pace, every step appearing to cause himself pain.

"It's a dreadfu' sicht, Mr. Monduff; ye canna blame me that I'm a wee thing mair upset nor a Christian man should be about ony mere worldly loss," he said nervously; "but I liked the lad weel and—man, yon's awfu'."

Another shivering fit passed over him; and although he gave humble attention to the commonplaces of consolation which were all the minister could offer him, and meekly professed his submission, it was clear that the fright he was labouring under was not much if at all alleviated.

He was eager to learn what had been done and what the discoverers of the body proposed to do. He suggested that they should carry the body to Clashgirn, and he would have it decently interred at his own expense. But when he was told that the fiscal had been sent for, and that the body was not to be removed or touched until his arrival, he regarded Mackie, who was his informer, uneasily, first declared that he would leave them to acquaint the fiscal with his proposition, then altered his mind and said he would wait himself.

He had not long to wait, for Geordie Armstrong had been fortunate enough to find the fiscal at a village not far from Portlappoch, and he had immediately driven with him to the place where his services were more particularly required. One of the men saw the gig coming up the road, and ran across the fields to meet it.

The gig stopped, and the man took the reins. The fiscal—Mr. Matthew Smart, a tall muscular man of about forty years, with a ruddy commonplace visage and a cheery smile—jumped to the ground. He had quick intelligent eyes and agile movement of limbs, but there was nothing in his dress or manner by which a stranger could have distinguished him from a well-to-do farmer. He was a farmer in a small way, and devoted all the leisure time he could command to agriculture.

He was followed by the old pensioner, Geordie Armstrong, with all the stiff dignity of a man who feels that he has

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done his duty well, and is capable of doing as much more as well.

The fiscal crossed the fields at a quick pace, nodded to the Laird and the minister, and asked where was the body. Dunbar and Mackie showed him; and without asking another question he proceeded deliberately to examine it from the head to the feet.

The men stood at a short distance watching him. Armstrong stood beside him, ready to render any assistance his superior might require. But he required none; and for half an hour he continued his labour without speaking a word.

When he had finished, he rubbed his hands on the damp grass and wiped them with his handkerchief. He stepped toward the Laird and Mr. Monduff.

"This is no case of accident, he said quietly; it's murder."

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

### CAIN'S MARK.

" His days shall troubled be and few,  
And he shall fall by treason too.  
He, by a justice all divine,  
Shall fall a victim to my shrine;  
As I was his, he shall be mine."—*J. Lowe.*

THE announcement which the fiscal made so calmly, amazed and bewildered the hearers, so that it was several minutes before any of them regained breath enough to speak.

"It's no possible," groaned the Laird, much shaken by the new phase which the calamity had assumed.

"No, it is not possible," exclaimed Mr. Monduff, "that anybody could have lifted a hand against him, for he was liked by everybody who knew him."

"Probably, probably," answered the fiscal, unmoved in his conviction; and taking out a pencil and note-book, he wrote down the result of his observations. That done he asked who had found the body, and Dunbar answered him.

"And you identified it at once?"

"Aye, I ken'd Jeamie Falcon before he gaed to sea, and I saw him on Saturday last wi' thae claes on. But the Laird can speak to that as weel as me, for he was a frien' o' his."

"And you also identified it?" (to the Laird).

"I'm sorry to say that I hae nae cause to doubt it's my puir frien', for I saw him in thae claes nae farer gone than Monday."

And he was led with much unwillingness to give an account of his relationship to the deceased, and why he had gone to sea.

"Where was he last seen alive, so far as you know?" proceeded Mr. Smart, making a note of everything.

"At Askaig, I believe."

"Then he was not living with you?"

"No" (shaking his head mournfully); "I wish he had been."

"And how was that, when you liked him so well?"

With the greatest reluctance the Laird was induced to explain that Falcon had come home, and finding his sweetheart married, had been a little touched in the head, he fancied, in consequence.

"Oh!" exclaimed the fiscal, "his lass married; and what's her name now?"

He was told.

"And where does she bide?"

"At Cairnieford."

"Aye, aye, I think I mind about her now—a daughter of Adam Lindsay, the fisher—a fine body, a fine body."

And there he dropped that part of the subject. He questioned Mackie and the others who had been with Dunbar as to how they had come to discover the body; and that led to an account of the finding of the horse on the previous day and the search for their master, which had brought about the discovery they had made.

Mr. Smart did not betray the least surprise at anything that was said. He accepted everything as quite a matter of course; and altogether did not seem to regard the event as half so serious as the persons he was examining thought it.

"As you are a relation of the deceased," he said to the Laird, when he had obtained all the information the men could give, "maybe you would not mind sending up a cart to remove the body?"

"Certainly, I'll do that; but can I take it to my place?"

"There's no reason why you should not."

"And I would like to bury him—puir lad, it's the last service I can do him; me wha thought he would hae been here to do that for me as my friend and heir."

"Oh, you intended him to be your heir? yes, you may bury him when you like after the doctor has examined him."

"Thank ye, sir; that's some sma' consolation anyway."

And the Laird took a pinch of snuff, the first his agitation had permitted him to take since his arrival. He looked much more like his own meek pawky self than he had done during the last hour or so.

"I will require to see all who are here now at the Port Inn to-morrow," continued the fiscal, accepting the pinch which the Laird proffered him, "and meanwhile I'm going to Askaig, and I want one of you to go with me."

"I hae to gang up at ony rate," said the Laird hastily; "I'll be pleased to accompany you, Mister Smart."

"Thank ye, Laird, but I would not like to trouble ye."

"Dinna mention it, I hae to gang to see how things are, and sae it's na trouble."

The fiscal nodded, and stepped aside to Geordie Armstrong, to whom he said something in so low a tone that none of the others could hear. Geordie said, "Aye, I understand perfectly," and the fiscal moved toward the road. He turned back quite carelessly, feeling his pockets, and looking at the ground as if he had lost something.

He stopped beside young Dunbar, and with one of his cheery smiles—

"I thought I had dropped my pencil, but I hae got it here in my pouch all right. Did you say you had seen Cairnieford last night?"

"Aye, he was biding at our house a' night."

"I want to see him as soon as I can get time. I ha'e ta'en a notion of one of his queys. I'll send you word at what time I want to see you to-morrow."

Geordie Armstrong happened to be standing near enough to hear what was said. The fiscal again moved toward the road, and Mr. Monduff hurriedly followed him.

"I know I may take the liberty, Mr. Smart," said the minister, touching his arm. "What causes you to think that this is a case of murder?"

"There can be no danger in trusting you, sir," answered the fiscal, "as you are not likely to repeat what I say, and supposing you did, I think it would make little difference."

"You may depend on my silence."

Being thus assured that his confidence—which it appeared was much the same whether declared or kept secret—would be respected, the fiscal proceeded—

"In my business, sir, I make it a rule never to think anything about a case until it is actually before me; and then only to think of each part as it appears, bringing the first observation to bear on the second, and the second on the third, but never speculating as to what the next may be."

"I see."

"Well, my first observation here, without knowing any of the circumstances of the case, further than that the body had been found in this state, was that the head and features were unrecognizable. That this should be the result of the head being battered against the rocks was quite likely. Observation second: there are five teeth remaining uninjured, sufficient to show that the mouth had been violently clenched, and between these teeth are several particles of wool, as if the man had been biting a plaid—not his own, for he had none, as you have seen."

"But he might have had one, and lost it in striving to save himself."

"Quite so; but he would not have been likely to bite at it unless it had been secured to some thing or person, and as he slipped into the water he might naturally have snatched at it

with his hands, or with his teeth, if his hands had been otherwise employed. But he would not have snatched at it if the plaid had been on his own shoulders, except maybe by accident."

"It is not probable."

"I thought you would admit it, sir. Now for observation three: round the neck is a circle of blue marks. They resemble the marks which two hands might make in clasping the throat with the thumbs pressing against the wind-pipe. In fact, the resemblance is so perfect to my mind—and I have had some experience in such matters, as you may fancy—that I am quite satisfied they were made by the hands of the person who heaved the young man into the spate."

"Was there anything else to confirm that opinion?" queried Mr. Monduff, unwilling to believe the worst so long as there was any chance of another explanation.

"Yes; there are marks round the left wrist showing that it had been grasped and twisted by a hand—a strong one too. It was an unlucky grip for the murderer, however, for it has left a trace which I think will enable me to find the arm and the body belonging to the hand."

"What was that, if I may ask?"

"A speck of tar—that does not rub out with one washing, and I think before it has time to wear out I will have the man in my grasp."

"But, my dear sir, a speck of tar is such a very slight clue. You will scarcely find a man at the Port who has not got tar on his hands. You will find tarry hands too amongst the farm folk wherever there has been a fence or a sty recently painted."

"Quite so, sir. It is a slight clue, as you say, and taken by itself would mean nothing. But it is the combination of these slight clues which enables justice to reach the criminal. You do not suppose that I would arrest the first man I found with tar or the mark of tar on his hand. Certainly not. But if I found a man at whom the other clues pointed, and having the signs of tar on the palm of his right hand, I would arrest him

at once, and be perfectly satisfied that I had secured the man I wanted."

Mr. Smart spoke in the easy manner of one dealing with an ordinary topic of conversation, but still with a tone of perfect conviction which impressed his hearer. Mr. Monduff's eyes were bent on the ground, and his hands clasped behind him on his staff as he kept pace with the leisurely step of the fiscal, who, notwithstanding his placidity, had vanity enough to be pleased by the minister's attention and the display of his own acumen.

"When I had examined the body," he went on, "my next step was to learn who the man was, and what was known about him. In the pocket of his trousers I had found a paper in the form of a pay-note of his Majesty's ship *Victory*, made out in the name of James Falcon. This with the identification of the Laird and Dunbar, was enough to satisfy me on that point. Then the information I received from you all presented this case to me as one of the clearest and simplest I have ever had to do with—so far as I see at present."

"Then you already suspect who the unhappy man is who has committed the crime?"

"I do."

"Am I acquainted with him?" (hesitatingly, for he did not like to accept the conclusion to which all the fiscal's argument tended.)

"That I cannot answer at present. But you will know by to-morrow."

The Laird on his pony overtook them. He had given Dunbar instructions to get a cart sent from Clashgirn to remove the body; and then having been assisted to mount, for he was too much shaken to get into the saddle unaided, he had followed the fiscal.

The latter jumped into his gig, and with a farewell nod to the minister, drove off toward Askaig, the Laird trotting behind on his pony.

Mr. Monduff meanwhile walked slowly back to Oban, and He was depressed by the events which had just

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but still more by the conclusions to which they pointed. Whether these conclusions were right or wrong, he foresaw that there was much unhappiness still in store for Jeanie Gray, and the thought of the task he had set himself, of reconciling her to her husband was almost completely lost in the shadow of graver matters.

He could not tell her all that the fiscal had said; and yet he was bound to recount enough to prepare her for what might follow. He felt his position to be an exceedingly difficult one, and he was at a loss how to acquit himself.

He was relieved of the difficulty by Jeanie herself.

She met him with a face white, cold, and fixed as marble. He regarded her wonderingly, but he could make nothing of that still face; it was so much more like the face of a corpse than that of a living woman, that he experienced a chill as if he had been brought into contact with an iceberg. He had rarely seen such an expression—or rather entire absence of expression; and on the rare occasions on which he had observed it, he had known that despair had frozen the heart.

"Was it him?" she asked, whisperingly.

"Yes, there can be no doubt the poor lad is dead."

She bowed her head, compressing her colourless lips, and clenching her hands spasmodically. He could not speak to her; all his experience suggested no words of comfort for such a case as this, the terror of which lay more in what was to come than in what had passed.

She looked up after a brief silence.

"Ye were anxious to meet my guidman before ye gaed awa' frae here; do ye want to see him yet?"

"I am, if possible, more anxious than I was before to see him."

"Then seek him—find him, and dinna fash him or yoursel' wi' ony words about me; but just tell him that Jeamie Falcon has been found dead in the burn, and let him dae what he thinks best."

The minister understood that the message she wished him to carry was in the shape of a warning by which a criminal

might escape from justice. But looking at her face, thinking of all the circumstances which surrounded her, he had not the heart to refuse.

"Ye will find him at Boghaugh," she said; "or if he's no there, they'll maybe be able to tell ye where he's gane to. There's naebody else he would heed but you, minister; and oh! he needs a friend's counsel sairly."

"He shall have it from me."

"Heaven bless ye for that, sir. I haena even thanks to gie ye enow, for my heart's see cauld and see heavy that it's like lead."

The minister took a short cut across the fields to Boghaugh. There he learned that Robin had left in the forenoon to visit Peter Carnegie, the writer, with whom he had some business to transact.

"He was in a dour miserable humour," said the old farmer, shaking his head dolefully; "and a' that I could dae or say wouldna bring him out o't. He has ta'en the notion sair to heart that his guidwife hasna been sae upright as she ought to hae been, and he's gaun to leave the kintry for a while."

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### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### AN UNPLEASANT DUTY.

"Now farewell, light, thou sunshine bright,  
And all beneath the sky,  
May coward shame disdain his name,  
The wretch that dares not die."—*Burns*.

It was dark before the minister reached the lawyer's house in the main street; and as he approached the door he observed a man standing by it. The man was erect and motionless as a sentinel on guard.

"Is that you, Armstrong?" queried Mr. Monduff, peering at the man and recognizing him.

"Aye, it's me, sir."

"Has the fiscal got back already?"



"No yet; but I expect him sune."

"Then who are ye waiting for?"

"I'm no just at liberty to say, minister; and I'll thank ye no to mention that I'm here."

By this time the door was opened by a servant girl, who ushered Mr. Monduff into a side room which was fitted up as an office. Mr. Carnegie was seated at his desk, busy writing down the instructions he was receiving from Robin Gray, who sat opposite him. Both turned toward the door at the entrance of the minister.

"Glad to see ye, Mr. Monduff," exclaimed the lawyer, a stout little man who had evidently thriven on his profession; "glad to see ye, but I hope your business wi' me is no very particular, for I hae been away from home, and here's Cairnieford been waiting for me a' day until he's lost his patience, and will no wait another minute though it was the king himself wanted me."

"It was Cairnieford I wanted to see, Mr. Carnegie."

"Aweel, there he is, and if ye can persuade him to take time to consider what he's about to do, it's mair than I could."

Robin threw up his hands as if to repudiate any interference.

"For Heaven's sake let there be nae mair said about it," he cried. "I tell ye that there's nae power on earth to gar me change my mind. Ye canna ken what I feel, and sae ye canna understand my reasons. I'm gaun awa' frae here, and I want to leave things sae that whatever happens to me she may never come to want. There's nae harm in that, I would think."

"I didna say there was any harm in that part o't," commented Mr. Carnegie, biting the end of his quill; "on the contrary, I think that's a very sensible provision."

"Let it be done then at once, for bide here anither night I winna—and canna."

When he had raised his hands, the flame of the candles standing on the desk had shone on them. Involuntarily Mr. Monduff had glanced at the palm of the right hand. He saw there a bluish mark, such as a stain of tar would make.

On seeing that, he spoke hurriedly and with a shade of sternness in his tone; for however much he might sympathize with the unfortunate, he could not feel quite comfortable under the suspicion that he was aiding and abetting a criminal to escape.

"I have not sought you for the purpose of trying to dissuade you from the course you have determined to adopt."

"I'm glad o' that."

"But not many hours ago, when I first obtained the particulars of your unhappy misunderstanding with your wife, I did think that a little conversation between us would have set matters right. Now, I am here simply to deliver a message, although I will not refuse any advice or assistance you may ask for and I can give."

"Who is the message frae?"

"Your wife. She bade me say to ye that the body of James Falcon has been found in the burn, and you are to do what you think best under the circumstances."

Robin stared at him blankly; and then, with darkening face—

"I canna say that I'm sorry for him as I ance would hae been; for he's made my life a burden to me and a curse. He has made me an outcast without friend or name, and I'm no sorry for him. I dinna ken though but I would like to change places wi' him."

He spoke in a grim sour manner that tended to confirm the horrible suspicion which had been forced on the minister.

"How did that happen?" inquired the lawyer, looking up quickly from his papers.

"Can ye no get that document finished first," interrupted Robin, "sae that I can sign it and get awa'? Ye'll hae time eneuch after to hear a' the news o' the world."

"In a' my acquaintance wi' ye, Cairnieford," said Mr. Carnegie, dipping the pen into the ink, "I never ken'd ye in such a dour temper as ye are the nicht."

He bent over the desk, and proceeded to write rapidly.

"Where do you intend going to?" said Mr. Monduff.

"Guid kens—anywhere that I'm maist likely to forget what's happened."

"And have ye no message for your wife before ye go?"

"Did she bid ye speir that?" (bitterly). "Maybe she thocht that your news would gar me rin back to her like a thrawart wean that's frichted by its ain thrawnness."

"No, she did not bid me ask that."

"Aweel, ye can tell her that if Jeamie Falcon was drooned fifty times ower it would make nae odds to me in what's gane an' by."

"I never thought you were a coward, Cairnieford, till now."

The man's eyes flashed angrily; and then, with a jerk of his head, indicating his indifference to anything that might be said or thought of him, he answered,—

"I canna help what ye think, minister, but neither can I see that I hae done anything but what ye might hae done yoursel' with the same provocation. · Onwyay, I hae tried hard to look the matter fair in the face and to do what was right."

"You cannot have much feeling for her, or you would not run away from the place and leave her to bear the brunt of the scandal your rash temper has raised."

"Nae feeling for her!—Oh, man, if ye could only ken half o' what I hae suffered on her account, ye wouldna say that. But dinna let us speak ony mair about it" (huskily). "Speaking winna mend it noo. Maybe I hae done her wrang, and I'm no so blind to my ain madness as no to hae my doubts on that score. God grant that it may be so, for she'll be happier then, let folk say what they like, than I can ever hope to be."

"I see it is useless arguing with you, and indeed I did not mean to do so, but I would like to carry her a little comfort, and you have enabled me to do that in owning that you may have been deceived by your anger."

"Oh, aye, if it's ony guid to her, ye can tell her that; an' ye can tell her too, if it'll do her ony guid to ken, that hell maun be a pleasant place compared wi' what this world has [redacted] to me since Tuesday."

The minister was as much shocked by the tone of the man as the words. The agony of the contest between love and jealous doubt was fierce as ever within him. It had tortured him all night; and all day, whilst he had been waiting for the lawyer's return, it had been whipping him into new outbursts of frenzy. He had avoided everybody as he had been wandering about trying to kill time. That was an occupation the nature of which he had never known until to-day, and a miserable one it had proved to him as to every one else.

He had nothing to look forward to except the one poorchance of finding the man who had brought the gig for Jeanie on the Tuesday afternoon, and of learning from him how far she had been deceived by his message. But there was little satisfaction in speculating upon the result of discovering the man, for at the best it could not bridge the black gulf which now seemed to sunder them for ever.

Shocked as he was by Robin's exclamation, the minister could not help pitying the evident misery which called it forth. Before he had time to reply, however, there was a knock at the outer door.

Mr. Monduff, instead of delivering the stern rebuke which had been on his lips, hastily bolted the door of the room, much to the astonishment of Mr. Carnegie, who just then looked up.

"What's wrang, minister?"

"Listen, Cairnieford," said Mr. Monduff, in an under-tone, "I believe that's the fiscal and the sheriff's-officer—have ye any cause to fear them?"

"Me! what should I fear a hunder fiscals and as mony sheriff-officers for?"

"You are sure of that? There is still time for you to get out by the back window. For your wife's sake Carnegie and I will turn our backs whilst you escape, if you wish to do so."

Robin stared; the lawyer raised his spectacles and looked bewilderedly from one to the other.

"What would I seek going out by the window for, when the door's there?"

The minister drew a breath of astonishment and relief, saying at the same time—

“ You remember what I told ye? Falcon’s body has been found.”

“ And what in the deil’s name, has that to do wi’ me and the window?”

“ Then I may unfasten the door?—they are at it.”

“ Surely.”

The minister regarded him, puzzled. Was it a manœuvre, or was he innocent?

He drew back the bolt, and the fiscal entered, grinning as good-naturedly as if he had just looked in to wish his acquaintances a friendly good-day.

“ Hallo, Cairnieford, you’re here!” he exclaimed, grasping the farmer’s hand. “ Man, it’s a while since I haes seen ye; and how are ye getting on? I heard ye were about to travel.”

“ Aye, it’s true.”

“ I’m sorry to hear that. Weel, afore ye gang will ye part wi’ yon quey ye bought at the Lammas fair? I’ll gie ye ten pounds. Come, say the word, is’t a bargain?”

He raised Robin’s right hand, palm upward, lifting his own right hand as if about to bring it down with a slap on that of Robin, which is the usual token among cattle-dealers of the conclusion of a bargain.

“ I canna bargain wi’ ye about onything in the present state o’ my affairs,” answered Cairnieford, drawing his hand away.

But the fiscal had observed the blue mark, and now touched him on the shoulder.

“ I would rather some other body had got this job in hand,” he said seriously; “ but since there’s nae help for’t I must do my duty. Robin Gray, you are my prisoner.”

Robin stared stupidly, first at the fiscal, then at Mr. Monduff, and next at the lawyer, who was leaning back on his chair, eyes and mouth wide with astonishment.

“ Ye were ay a joky chiel’, fiscal,” said Robin in a low agitated voice; “ but I canna just see the fun o’ this.”

"It is no joke, Cairnieford, but sober earnest, and it's the most unpleasant bit of business I hae ever had to do."

"What do ye mean? What hae I done?"

"I hope you will be able to prove that you have not done it; but at present the proof is strong against ye."

"Proof o' what?"

"You are charged with the murder of James Falcon."

Robin was like one struck dumb; and for an instant his huge form quivered. Then, with an angry roar like that of an infuriated bull, he flung the fiscal from him.

"It's an infernal lee, and ye shall never make me a prisoner on sic a charge. Haud aff, or it'll be the waur for ye. I hated the man, and when I found him and my wife thegither the deevil was strong in me to fell him on the spot. But I ran awa' frae the place sae that I mightna be tempted mair than I could bear, and I haena seen him since. I'll answer for a' that I hae done in ony court; but ye shall not drag me to a jail like a common thief sae lang as I hae pith in thir twa arms to keep ye aff."

"Your resistance only makes the thing look worse against ye," said the fiscal, not in the least disturbed, notwithstanding the fury and gigantic strength of the man who opposed his arrest.

The minister interfered to prevent what threatened to be a serious affray.

"If you are innocent, Cairnieford, go with Mr. Smart quietly. That will be the best and firmest denial you can give to the charge which he feels compelled to make against you. Be calm, I beseech you, and do not by your rashness add to the difficulties of your position. For your own sake, for your wife's sake, be careful what you do."

At the remembrance of his wife his vigour deserted him; his whole form seemed to collapse, and he covered his face with his hands, sobbing.

"Aye, there's the sting o't," he cried bitterly. "To think that a' this comes o' carin' ower muckle about her. . . . Aweel, aweel, what needs I care for life or onything that may

befa' me? The warst and the best o't is that we can only dee ance. . . . I'll gae wi' ye, fiscal, peaceably. Do ye want to put me in airns? Here, put your handcuffs on my wrists and your shackles on my feet—dae wi' me as you like; I dinna mind onything noo."

His chin sank on his breast; and his countenance presented the dull expressionless cast of utter indifference to whatever portion fate might have in store.

"There will be no necessity for such desperate precautions," said the fiscal in a friendly tone; "you'll only have to come over to the inn wi' me to-night, and you'll hae to let Geordie Armstrong sleep in the same room wi' you—that's a'; and I gie ye my word that ye shall be treated wi' a' the respect due to a man wha may be able to prove himself innocent."

"Thank ye" (indifferently).

"And until you hae failed to do that," broke in the minister, "do not think that your friends will forsake ye."

"Friends!—I hae few o' them; but gin I had thousands they could never gie me back the peace I hae lost, or clear the guid name that's trampled i' the mire this night."

He accompanied the fiscal without another word, but with his head bowed as if he could never raise it again to encounter the gaze of his fellow-men.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE WORST OF IT.

"An airy night, a cheerless day,  
A lanely hame at gloamin' hour;  
When o'er the heart come thoughts o' wae,  
Like shadows on Glenfillan's tower."—*G. Allan.*

SHE had been expecting the blow, and she met it stoutly.

There was no display of weakness, no visible sign of the terror at her heart, when Adam reached the house late that night in stern ill-humour—which was not improved by the



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extra glass of raw whisky he had taken at the inn, where he had got the news—with the information that Robin had been arrested.

Adam was hard and unforgiving toward Robin ; but, having no opportunity of venting his wrath upon him, he seemed to fancy that the next best thing was to speak as harshly to Jeanie as if it had been all her fault in marrying such a man. He did not show this when sober; but that extra glass had filled up his indignation until it overflowed upon the first object he approached.

She let his ill-humour pass without a word; indeed, she was too much occupied by the more important matter of his tidings to heed him.

Then Geordie Armstrong arrived by breakfast-time next morning to summon her to the presence of the fiscal. With lips tightly clenched and head a little bowed she received his message, but she uttered no cry of alarm. She had never seemed stronger or calmer in her life than when she proceeded to put on her plaid, and started for the Port.

Her father was summoned too, but she did not wait for him. She only stayed to leave some directions with one of the lassies about her mother, and departed at once, as if she were eager to know the worst and have done with it.

She walked the distance, and Geordie Armstrong, who accompanied her, was amazed by the firmness and rapidity of her steps. She seemed to gain rather than lose strength as she proceeded. The movement exhilarated her, and changed the deathly pallor of her face to a warm flush. But her lips were still clenched, her head a little bowed, and she would not speak.

At every step she felt as if she were beating down some part of the accusation against her husband. She would not believe him guilty, no matter what proof might be adduced. She would hold him blameless in spite of all that others might say, in spite of all her own knowledge of the events and the fatal inference to which they pointed so directly. She would hold him blameless, and she would devote her life to satisfy

the world that he was innocent, in spite of all the wrong he had done her.

These were the thoughts which inspired her with a vigour and calmness that caused those who saw her to marvel. But, underlying all, there was a tremulous fear which she strove fiercely to thrust aside.

With the generous impulse of a good woman, the moment she heard of his peril she put away the anger she was entitled to feel towards him, and the reflection of the miserable future he had left for her, and thought only of how she might best serve him. Although they were separated, and nothing could ever bring them together again, she turned bravely to the task to which gratitude and love urged her—to save him.

In front of the inn she saw the Laird's pony, and that she took to be a bad omen, for Clashgirn carried ill-luck wherever he went to everybody but himself.

As she was about to enter the room where the fiscal was in attendance with his clerk, Rob Keith came forth. He looked confused and startled at sight of her, and slunk away like a dog with its tail between its legs, glad to have escaped an expected whipping. She just gave one quick glance toward him and entered the room.

The fiscal had expected to see a woman in tears at least, if not in a state of hysterical agitation; and he was consequently astonished to see her standing there so quietly waiting for him to speak.

"You are Mrs. Gray?" he said; and the clerk's pen proceeded to scratch busily.

"Yes, sir" (modestly).

"And do ye know why I have asked you to come here?"

"Ye hae sent for me, and I'm here. Ye'll tell me what ye want wi' me, I suppose."

"Then you do not know that your husband has been arrested?"

"I ken that, and I ken what for, and I'm ready to answer anything ye speir at me to the best of my ability."

This was the most willing witness the fiscal had ever come

across; and, like all men who are accustomed to view life from one side—and the worst—of its character, he was perplexed, and immediately began to seek a motive for conduct which was somewhat beyond his experience.

"Well, Mrs. Gray," he went on presently in his cheeriest tone, "I'm a friend o' your guidman's. Let that be distinctly understood between us, and you'll easily see that the questions I'm going to ask ye are as much for his own benefit as because they come in the way of my duty."

"I'm glad ye're his friend, sir," and she looked at him as if she could not quite reconcile his friendship with his present position.

"It's a melancholy affair," he said, catching her look and its meaning, "and puts us all in an awkward predicament. But I hope we'll soon get out o't. Now, I'll be plain wi' you, and no try to blind you wi' a roundabout way of questioning you, and I expect you to be as plain and straightforward in your answers."

"I'll try."

"Sit down then, and make yourself as comfortable as you can."

She obeyed him, clasping her hands on her lap, and keeping her eyes fixed on him, watching every movement of his features.

"You were at Askaig on Tuesday last?"

"I was."

"What took ye there?"

She told him of the false message she had received, exactly as she had told her husband.

"And whilst ye were there, Cairnieford arrived, and had some words with you and James Falcon?"

"Yes" (breathing with difficulty).

"You were left alone in the house, and you went out. What caused you to quit the house on such a night?"

"I wanted to get home."

"It was not anything you heard that caused you to go out?"

"No."

"Well, when you were out, what took you round by the Brownie's Bite?"

"I missed the road."

"Did you see anything?"

"It was very dark."

"Aye, but there was lightning; you might have seen something when it was flashing."

She knew now that Rob Keith had told everything. Was she to confirm his statement, and perhaps consign her husband to the scaffold? It was a cruel ordeal she was undergoing. She felt as if she were being suffocated—felt as if she were the guilty one, and that she was responsible for Falcon's death and Robin's trial.

"It was very dark," she repeated slowly, "and the lightning dazed my e'en."

The fiscal drew his lips together and brought his hand across his chin, pursing the flesh.

"Well, you heard something at any rate?"

"The wind was blowing strong, and the spate was roaring loud."

"Then do you mean to say positively that you heard nothing except the wind and the spate?"

"I was in sair distress, and it was an unco stormy night."

"But you heard a cry like what a man might give if he was in danger? You must have heard that?"

She was silent.

"I thought you were to speak freely to me," he said quietly. "Now, let me warn you, that you will just make the affair look all the worse for your guidman if you show any unwillingness to answer me."

"Oh, man, how can you expect me to be willing to answer what may be the death o' my man?"

"Then you did hear the cry?"

"Aye, Heaven help me, I did."

"And after that, immediately or any time before you fainted, did you see or hear your guidman?"

She clutched the folds of her plaid, as if she found it necessary to seize upon something to support her.

"Come, Mrs. Gray, I'm sorry to fash you, but I have a little more to ask you. What was it frightened you into the faint?"

"I canna rightly say what "(chokingly).

"Was it not your husband's voice?"

"I couldna say—I didna see him."

"But you heard him—he spoke to you; perhaps he struck you?"

"No, he didna do that, he never did that——"

"She checked herself; but there was no escape now; her vehemence had betrayed her; and the fiscal bent over a paper he had in his hand to conceal the satisfaction he could not help feeling at the success of that cunning stroke.

"No, he did not strike you; but he spoke to you, and that was what frightened you, and you fainted. Nae wonder ye were scared to find him there after what had passed, and just after that waeful screech. What did he say?"

"Naething."

And she closed her lips with a firmness which showed that it would not be easy to get any more information from her.

"Aweel, aweel, that's neither here nor there," he said in his most good-natured tone; "but you have seen him since then—I mean since you got home from Askaig?"

"Aye, I saw him on Wednesday."

"And did you know that he was going to leave the country?"

"He said he was gaun awa'."

"What was his reason for that?"

"Naething but the quarrel atween him and me—and that's been the cause o' a' his trouble and mine. Oh, sir, dinna speir ony mair questions at me. I hae naething mair to tell ye, and ye are rending my heart wi' every word."

And she threw the end of her plaid over her face to hide its pallid pain. But she uttered no sound; there was only the convulsive agitation of her breast to indicate the anguish she was trying so hard to smother.

Mr. Smart was not a hardened man, notwithstanding his

profession and the scenes of misery with which it accustomed him. He was touched by her grief, and respected it. He turned his back toward her and spoke to the clerk, who was still busy writing.

When the clerk had finished, the fiscal addressed Jeanie again.

"I'll relieve you in a minute, Mrs. Gray, if you'll just listen to this, and sign it, if there's nothing in it you object to."

He read over the statement which his examination had wrung from her. Every word beat upon her ears like the blow of a hammer. Every word seemed to strike a nail into the gibbet which was looming so darkly before her. There was nothing she had not said, and yet the statement read to her by the fiscal seemed so black, so fatally suggestive of Robin's guilt, that her flesh quivered, and she sickened at the thought that she had spoken his doom.

"Will you sign it?" said Mr. Smart gently.

"Maun I sign it?"

"I am afraid I will have to insist, unless there is anything in it you think you have not said."

"There is nothing, but——"

"You are afraid it will go against him; but you must not lose heart. I hope he'll come through all right yet."

"Do ye think that—oh, sir, do ye think that?" (with painful eagerness).

He did not think it, but he felt obliged to say something to console her.

"I hope so, Mrs. Gray. I'm trying to find the man that brought the gig for you, as I fancy he might give the whole affair a new turn."

"Do you believe that?"

"It's possible."

"Then I'll find him," she said firmly, and taking the pen without further hesitation she signed the statement in the slow awkward manner of one little accustomed to penmanship.

"Have you any notion who the man was?" queried Mr. Smart, whilst the clerk folded up the paper and docketed it.

"No, but I'll find him."

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"We got word that he was the ostler at the Drybrig Inn, but it was not him. How do you propose to seek him?"

"I dinna ken yet; but will ye let me see my guidman for a minute? I hae just ae word to speak to him. Oh, sir, dinna refuse me. He's in sair need o' some one to bid him keep up his heart; and maybe if he kens that I'm trying to save him it will gie him courage to bear the cruel shame that's on him."

"Aye, ye can see him, and I wish ye may be able to cheer him, for he's more dooncast than any man I ever saw. Come this way. He's to be taken away to the jail this afternoon."

He conducted her himself to the room in which Robin was confined. An officer who had been summoned to the Port with the clerk was on guard. The fiscal had considerably left the prisoner to himself, although it would have been no very difficult task for Robin to have made his escape by the window, if he had been so inclined. But the fiscal's confidence was justified; and the prisoner was apparently too indifferent as to what might become of him to have quitted the room, even if the door had been left wide open and unguarded.

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE TEST.

"Roll on, thou cold and stilly hours,  
    Roll on, like waves that gently fan  
The morning with her homed flowers,  
    When leaves grow brighter every one."—*W. B. Sangster.*

HE was sadly changed since she had last seen him. He looked so old, so broken down and helpless, that her impulse was to run to him, fling her arms round him, and soothe him with sweet words of comfort and love. Yes, love, for the throbbing of her heart, its wild yearning toward him, could spring from no other cause. His suffering, his mad jealousy, and his peril, all conspired to teach her how dear he was to her.

She had never cared for him as she did now—now that she could not claim the right to comfort him. It seemed as if it

were only in hating him that she was to learn how much she valued him. Something swelled in her breast, and seemed to be about to burst, so that she stood still, and could not speak. That impulse to clasp him in her arms was strong upon her, and would have been obeyed had it not been checked by the cold glance with which he regarded her.

He had been sitting by the window, looking down at the street, watching with hopeless eyes the people passing to and fro. He could never more amongst them again. Even if he escaped the fate which threatened him, he could not walk down that street where he had been always greeted by friendly faces and tongues, and meet the doubting glances which would be cast upon him, and hear the whispers of his shame.

But his pain was not acute now; he had passed into the stage of dull hopeless misery, and he only wearied for the end to come speedily and release him. As he looked out and yearned for the precious liberty which was denied him, and which those folks down there appeared to hold so lightly, he seemed to be another person who was longing for freedom. He seemed to be possessed of two individualities, the one still clinging to life and its privileges, the other weary of it and ready to die.

When the door opened he had not moved, thinking probably that it was his jailor or the fiscal; but when Jeanie's suppressed breathing found vent in a low sob, he looked round slowly. There was no gleam of pleasurable recognition on his features, which had grown so sharp and shrivelled, and that was what stopped her. Even if he had regarded her with the anger or scorn he had displayed at their last meeting, she would have been less pained than she was by that stony look. However, it nerved her to the task which had brought her hither.

He rose slowly from his seat and stood as if expecting her to speak. She noticed then how his tall form, which used to be so erect and firm, was bent as if under a load too great for him to bear. But he made no movement toward her, made no sign of any tender memories; and, womanlike, she felt as if

she were humiliated in the service she was trying to render him.

"I see ye're no pleased that I should come near ye," she faltered, "e'en when ye're in sic sair need o' friends as ye are enoo; but I winna fash ye lang."

"I wasna expecting ye," he answered in a low husky voice.

"No"—(with a tone of sad bitterness)—"ye couldna think weel'eneuch o' me to fancy that I would care what came o' ye. Ye thought that I would just leave ye to whatever might happen without trying to help ye. Maybe I should hae done that, but I couldna. I dinna care what ye may think o' me, but I couldna sit idle at hame and ken ye needed help without trying to gie it ye."

"I'm thankfu' to ye."

"I dinna seek your thanks, I dinna need them. Wi' Heaven's will I shall do what a wife should do for ye in your trouble; but when that's by, ye'll find that I can keep awa' frae ye—aye, as dourly as ye would keep awa' frae me."

He passed his hand absently over his brow, and his lips trembled. It was a wretched sight, this strong man weak and helpless as a child.

"I'm thankfu' to ye," he said again feebly.

And at that all her bitterness vanished, leaving only the fond sympathetic woman. She advanced to him and laid her hand on his arm. He trembled at her touch, but he made no effort to thrust her from him, as she had half feared he would do.

"I hae just ae question to speir," she said softly; "and after that I'll no fash ye ony mair wi' my presence."

"I'm listening."

"Did ye meet Jeamie Falcon after ye left me in Askaig house? Did ye see him again, or hear him, or come near him in ony way?"

She watched him with terrible eagerness as she pronounced the words.

The question seemed to rouse him from his lethargy. He rose to his height, erect and firm as he had been before this

calamity. He shook her hand from his arm and his eyes flashed angrily.

" You too doubt me !" he exclaimed hoarsely ; " but what else could I expect ? you wha never cared for me and loved him,—what could ye do but be the first to think me guilty ? "

" Oh man, dinna speak thae cruel fause words to me the noo ; but answer me—answer me frae your heart truly as though ye was at the Judgment-seat, and gie me strength to save ye."

He regarded her fixedly for an instant, and then answered with a steady voice, only avoiding Falcon's name—

" I never saw him, or heard him, or came near him to my knowledge, after I left him and you in Askaig house."

" God be thanked—Oh, God be thanked for that !" she cried dropping on her knees with clasped hands upraised and tears of grateful joy streaming down her cheeks.

He turned his back upon her, for he could not look upon that face so bright with faith in him without a sharp twinge of remorse for all he had done to cloud it. She whom he had so readily doubted, whose truth he had so doggedly refused to credit; she whom he had spurned from him, accepted his single word against all the evidence in the world. That was the sharpest sting of all, to feel that she could trust him so much when he had shown so little trust in her.

She misinterpreted his movement ; she thought he was unrelenting, still believed her guilt and wished her gone. But she did not care for that now. The lingering shadow which had lurked in her mind, and against which she had striven so hard to close her eyes, was dispelled, as a stream of light chases the darkness from a room when the shutters are thrown open.

She rose to her feet, strong and resolute to save him, indifferent whether he doubted or believed her, loved or scorned her. It was no part of her calculation that she should win him back to her by rescuing him from his present danger. She would have shrunk with loathing from the thought if it had occurred to her. It was the pure motive of a generous

nature to serve one to whom she was grateful for much kindness in spite of all his latter cruelty. And as resolute as she was to save him, just as resolute was she that, the task accomplished, she would leave him to follow his own course in life.

"Dinna be dooncast," she said in a low hopeful voice, and it had never sounded so sweetly as now; "ye sha'na die the death o' shame; Heaven winna let it be, and there are thae wha'll rest neither day nor nicht till a' that looks sae black against ye is made clear. Tak' courage in thinking o' that."

"Jeanie, Jeanie," he cried with broken voice, "ye make my heart ache wi' the thocht o' the wrang I hae done ye. Oh, I hae been mad—mad, and God help me. I only see it noo when it's maybe ower late—Jeanie!"

He called her wildly, but she had gone before he had turned round; gone the moment she had finished speaking, without having heard that outburst which would have comforted her so. There was nothing but the closed door to answer him; and somehow the fancy came and chilled him that his own hand had closed and barred the door between himself and his happiness.

But her sweet words were echoing in his brain, wooring back the desire to live, and with it were coming courage and hope. He began to pace the floor thoughtfully, agitatedly, and the sunshine seemed to have penetrated the chamber since she had been there.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE EVIDENCE.

"Let come what will, I'll ne'er believe  
But truth will get the better o't:  
The mirkest hour ay brings reprieve—  
The doubt o' truth's the traitor o't."—*The Cateran.*

JEANIE, with rapid steps, proceeded to the house of the lawyer, Peter Carnegie. She required guidance, and he was the man

from whom to seek it. She was not going to waste precious time by any blundering which her ignorance of the work she had undertaken might cause. She would seek help from whomsoever and wherever it might be obtained. She had promised to prove Robin's innocence, and she meant to do it, although she had not at present any clue to the riddle she was determined to solve. Her prompt decisive steps indicated that she brought strength and courage to the task.

Mr. Carnegie was not at home, but the servant-girl who admitted her said he was only over at the inn, and would be back soon. Jeanie was ushered into the office, where a boy was busy copying some documents, and there she waited. The boy did not speak, but he looked a great deal at the client, and indeed gave her almost as much attention in that way as he gave his work.

The lawyer came at last, much to Jeanie's relief, for her patience was limited by her excited desire to be doing something, and sitting silently there did not appear to be furthering her business much.

Mr. Carnegie had a bundle of papers in his hand, and he wore an expression of much pre-occupation. When he perceived who was waiting for him, he saluted her gravely, and before permitting her to speak he despatched his boy on some errand.

"That'll keep the callan' out o' the road, Mrs. Gray, while we hae a crack—he's got the langest lugs and the glibbest tongue of any laddie of his ain age in the town. He'll make a capital lawyer if he doesna fa' into some mischief or he's auld enough. I suppose ye come about your guidman? Aye, it's a sad business, a sad business."

"But we must bring him through't, Mr. Carnegie, for he's innocent."

"We!" raising his eyebrows and pulling his vest straight on his little stout body. "I'll do everything in my power for him, Mrs. Gray, but the affair looks bad at present, I'm compelled to admit."

"That doesna matter, sir, we maun save him."

"We! Are you prepared to suggest onything that may throw a new light on the subject then?"

"I canna say yet; but I want to ken a' the particulars o' the evidence they hae arrested him on."

She spoke with so much firmness that Mr. Carnegie, who was at first a little huffed by her apparent desire to relieve him of some of his responsibility without even asking permission, at once complied with her request. That was saying a great deal for the impression she had made on him; for although he was a sociable sensible little man in other respects, he was apt to take prejudices so strongly that they sometimes interfered with his duty; and on no subject was he so ready to become prejudiced as on anything which ruffled the sense of his own importance.

"I hae been over at the inn all the morning, for of course being Cairnieford's regular agent I took the matter in hand the moment I heard about it. I hae got, partly from the fiscal himsel'-he and I are capital friends ye ken—and chiefly frae the folk he examined, a summary of all the evidence he has before him, except what you told him, and that of course ye'll let me ken at once with ony additions that may occur to you.

He unfolded the papers he had brought in with him, arranged them in their proper order according to the figures on each, and proceeded—

"The first thing I have here is the evidence of the finding and identification of the body, by John Dunbar the younger, in the service of his father at Boghaugh, Thomas Mackie, grieve at Cairnieford, and George Barr and David Hogg, ploughmen at Cairnieford aforesaid——"

"I ken a' about the finding o' the body, sir; what I want to ken is how they connect my guidman wi't?" she interrupted.

Mr. Carnegie was a little put out by this check. He cleared his throat, however, and resumed—

"I must place the business before ye in due order, Mrs. Gray, or you will never see it clearly; but I'll pass over anything you may be already acquainted with, if you'll just let me ken when I touch on it. Well, when the body was found, it

was supposed that death had resulted from accident. But the fiscal, from certain unmistakable marks on the person, declared at once that it was a case of murder. Dr. Lawrie, surgeon of this town, having subsequently examined the body, confirms the fiscal's assertion, in so far as that there was certainly violence used by some person on the deceased immediately prior to death."

"But that's no to say who used the violence."

"No, but the crime became associated with Robin Gray, farmer, of Cairnieford"—(he was very particular about names of persons and places)—"in this manner. John Dunbar and Thomas Mackie being interrogated as to what had induced them to search the stream—for without a search the body might have been for years undiscovered—deposed that it was in consequence of an alarm on the previous day (Wednesday), that Robin Gray had met with some accident; said alarm being raised by the discovery in the burn of a horse on which he had quitted his home on Tuesday evening in violent haste and passion.

"In the course of the inquiry a very distinct cause of disagreement between deceased, James Falcon, and Robin Gray was revealed—I need not tell you what that cause was, I suppose?" (looking over the desk at her).

"I ken what it was" (calmly).

"The question being asked where deceased had been last seen alive, Nicol McWhapple, Esquire, of Clashgirn, affirmed that, to the best of his knowledge and belief, it must have been at Askaig, an upland farm, the property of deponent. The fiscal proceeded to Askaig, and Robert Keith being interrogated—

"I ken a' that he could tell."

"Very well, but there are two important points in his evidence which it may be as well to remind you of. After relating that he had seen Falcon lying on the floor, and Cairnieford kneeling on him with every appearance of great anger, he deposed that Cairnieford had called to him, Robert Keith, to keep James Falcon away from him, or 'he would be the death of him.' That's the first point; the second is even

more condemnatory. Keith, having at your instigation gone out to seek your guidman, after wandering about some time without finding him, had heard voices, followed the sound, and got to the back of the house which overlooks the precipice known as the Brownie's Bite. A flash of lightning enabled him to see two men; and the instant after he heard a loud scream. He moved two or three steps forward, when he heard a man's voice; he gripped the man, and recognized him as Robin Gray.

"That, in conjunction with the previous quartel" and the threat is a very awkward bit of evidence. Next, it is shown that the accused had not been at his own house since the night of the spate, and has been going about in a very disturbed state of mind, making arrangements for leaving the country immediately."

"It was all on account of the quarrel between him and me —no because he was feared to bide at hame, or he would ha'e gane at once," she said uneasily.

"No doubt, and I mark it as a great point in his favour that he did not disguise his intention of going away from anybody who spoke to him. But the fiscal puts another construction on it, and there's no denying that it might be the case, that's to say, that he did not hide his purpose because he did not expect the crime to be detected so soon; and in his absence, when it would be discovered, the fact that he had gone away openly and without concealment of any sort would have tended to divert suspicion from him, if events had come about as he is supposed to have calculated."

"Ye say that as though ye doubted that it might be true."

"I'm just putting the evidence before you, and in these cases a legal adviser's duty is like a doctor's—first let him ken the worst of the disease, and syne he'll try to find the cure."

"Aye, sir, aye, let me ken the worst."

Mr. Carnegie glanced over the desk again. He was surprised by her calmness and the sharpness with which she seized upon every point of the evidence; and the surprise increased as he proceeded.

"As you can see," he went on, "all this with very disagreeable directness associates Robin Gray wi' this crime. Now, one thing which showed the fiscal that the deceased had been assassinated, was the finding of several particles of wool between the teeth of the dead man, as if, in the struggle to save himself, he had seized his antagonist's plaid between his teeth."

"But Robin had nae plaid on that night," she said, with brightening eyes; "he had thrown it aff when he got hame frae the market on Tuesday afternoon, before he ken'd I was awa'. He didna bide to put it on again, and the plaid's lying in the house yet to prove it."

The lawyer seized a pen, paused and looked at her as if the something he thought he'd found was not quite so sure in his grasp as at the first moment appeared.

"Did you notice on that night at Askaig that he had no plaid on?"

"No"—(a little damped but brightening again)—"I was ower muckle put about to notice onything o' that kind; but some o' the men would hae noticed that he gaed awa' without it, if ye'll speir at them. Besides you said enow that it was proved he hadn'a been at hame since that night. Weel, he has only twa plaids, and they are baith in the house."

"That's important for our side."

And with a glow of satisfaction he made a note of the statement.

"There, I think that will puzzle Mr. Smart, for he's wonderfully particular about every item o' a case dovetailing with ane anither. He's a clever man, and no a bad chiel' either. Weel, that's one point settled; but here's another that's more fatal in its proof, and I'm afraid ye'll no manage to get rid of it so easily. On the left wrist of the dead man, which was blue marked by the grip of somebody, there was a speck of tar. On the palm of Robin Gray's right hand when he was arrested there was a bluish mark like what tar would leave for a day or two."

He paused as if to permit this startling coincidence to obtain its due effect. Jeanie did not appear to be startled, however;

she pondered with knitted brows as if seeking the explanation which she was satisfied was to be found somewhere.

"Hae ye asked Robin himsel' how that happens?" she said, lifting her eyes.

"I have his deposition here, exactly as he made it to the fiscal, he says. I will come to it directly. You can see that circumstance argues against him with the rest. I think I have told you everything of importance now—oh, aye, except that at the top of the precipice called the Brownie's Bite, the fiscal saw plain signs of a struggle near a place where the paling was broken, and he found not far distant from that spot a bonnet, which has been identified by Robert Keith and Clashgirn as having belonged to the deceased.

"Now look at the whole evidence honestly; first the well-known cause of disagreement between the men; second, the quarrel which took place on the night of the spate; third, the threat or caution; fourth, the presence of the men at the dangerous place; fifth, the fact that Robin Gray was seen there immediately after the scream was heard; sixth, the tar on the wrist of the dead man and on the palm of the living; and seventh the fact that the prisoner was about to leave the country; and you cannot help owning with me that it has an ugly appearance."

Mr. Carnegie leaned back, crossing his hands and shutting his mouth, regarding his hearer with the air of a man who has propounded an unanswerable problem, and awaits complacently the futile attempts to expound it he expects to be made.

But whatever attempts Jeanie made mentally, she did not express them. She fixed her eyes on the floor for a little while, and then said quietly—

"Will ye let me hear noo what Robin himsel' answers to it a'?"

"Certainly; but first let me explain the theory of the case—that is, Mr. Smart's theory, as far as I can make it out from what he has said to me. His idea appears to be, that Cairnieford and the deceased by some mischance met again after they had quitted the house; that the quarrel was renewed, and in

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the struggle Falcon was tumbled over the precipice. He so far acquits him of the intent to murder ; but that does not mend the matter much."

" But it's ay something to ken that they dinna think he could do sic a thing intentionally."

" You mus'n't fancy that the fiscal will admit that in prosecuting ; but we'll have to use it as a plea for recommendation to mercy if we should fail in everything else."

She could not help a slight shudder at the cool way in which he suggested that possibility, as if it had been one of the commonest things in the world.

" Here's his deposition"—(peering into the paper)—" and it's short enough to be true at any rate. He admits every-thing,—in opposition to my advice and wish, you understand ; he should not have admitted anything. He admits everything up to the moment he quitted the house, then he deposes—

" 'I found that my horse had broken from its tether. I wandered about, seeking it, down by the road as far as the burn where the spate was at its worst, and back again and round by the house. I was more than two hours seeking the horse, as near as I could calculate. I did not heed the rain or wind or cold. I was too much agitated at the time to attend to anything outside of me. I had no thought where I was going or of the danger of falling over any of the crags, until my progress was checked by the paling which stands by the edge of the Brownie's Bite.'

" 'As soon as I touched the paling, I caught glimpses of the white foam of the waters below, and I knew where I was. I stood there some time. Cannot say how long, or what par-ticular reason I stopped there for, except that in the humour I was in then I liked the wild sound of the spate and the cold rain falling on me.'

" 'At last I was turning away from the place when I heard an eerie shriek. It startled me, for I was not so cool as I am for ordinary. I minded the stories I had heard about the kelpie, and could not think of anything else that it might be at such a time and in such a place.'

"That's the weakest bit of it all," interrupted the lawyer, and read on—

"I looked about and saw nothing. There had been a flash of lightning just before the shriek, and that dazed my eyes for a minute. It did occur to me presently that somebody might have fallen over the Bite, unlikely as it seemed for anybody to be out on such a night; but I thought again that it must have been all a mere fancy. I was too much disturbed to think or reason coolly, and was hurrying away from the place when I stumbled against a woman.

"Recognized her to be my wife, and in consequence of what had passed between us, was about to quit her when she fell to the ground in a faint. Almost at the same moment Robert Keith gripped my arm, and asked me what I had been doing. Did not mind the question at the time, but told him to carry my wife into the house, and broke away from him. Gave up the attempt to find the horse, and proceeded across the hills, down to the low road by the shore, and walked on to Portlappoch, where I arrived some time in the forenoon.

"It is a dangerous pathway across the hills, and is rarely used; but have travelled it several times before; certainly not in the dark. It was very dark on this night. Cannot say how I occupied the time from Askaig to my arrival in the town. Was too much agitated to pay much attention to where I was going, and I suppose the time was occupied in wandering about the hills. Know that I lost the way frequently, as I could have travelled the distance thrice in the same space of time under ordinary circumstances.

"Went to Girzie Todd, the fishwife's, and stayed in her cottage, whilst I sent her to Cairnieford for my father-in-law, Adam Lindsay. Did not care to go myself, because I did not want to see anything which would remind me of my wife. In consequence of what had passed between her and me, was preparing to leave Portlappoch for a time, but without any fixed plan as to where I was going or how long I might be absent.

"The mark on my right hand is from tar. I got it in the market on Tuesday when I was examining some sheep which

were marked on the back with tar that forenoon, so that it was not dry and stuck to my hand when I accidentally touched it. Noticed it at the time, and rubbed my hand in the wool of the sheep. Do not think there was sufficient left on my hand to stain anything afterward, and it dried in a little while.'

"There," ejaculated the lawyer, thrusting the paper from him with strong disapprobation: "ye see he admits everything just as if he was in a hurry to ram his head into the noose. It's the most ridiculous deposition for a man to make wi' the gallows lowering on him that ever I saw or heard o'."

"Aye, but it's the deposition of an honest and an innocent man," said the wife, proud of his truth in defiance of the peril of it.

"No doubt; but a man may be as innocent as he likes, if his own and everybody else's testimony proves him guilty, they'll hang him a' the same."

"But they sha'na do that. I tell ye we maun save him."

"That's easy said; but how are we to do it? We'll have to find first somebody to take his place, and that somebody must have tar on his hand and a big grudge in his heart against the deceased. And that will be no easy job, for, by all accounts, Falcon never sought to harm anybody, unless it might be your guidman."

"Never sought to harm onybody," she repeated thoughtfully; and suddenly she sprang to her feet, crying excitedly, "I ken the man!"

"Lord's sake, what's the matter!" exclaimed Carnegie, infected by her excitement, and jumping up also.

"On the morning when Jeamie Falcon came to Cairnieford, he promised me that he would gang awa' and never come back," she said breathlessly; "he didna gang, and on that awfu' night when I charged him wi' deceiving me and trying to come between me and my guidman, he tauld me that he had waited only that he might do an act o' justice. He had determined to bring Ivan Carrach, the skipper, to the scaffold, for some ill he had done, and Ivan Carrach that he was waiting for came and killed Jeamie to save himsel'."

"Eh, EH, EH!" ejaculated the lawyer in a crescendo tone of amaze, "can you prove that? Hae ye ony proof o' that?"

"He told me himsel' what he was waiting for—isna that proof?"

"But did onybody else hear him say it?"

"No"—(reflecting, then briskly)—"Aye, Wattie Todd was in the room at Askaig when he said it, and maun hae heard him."

"Wattie Todd, the daftie?"

"Aye."

Mr. Carnegie's countenance fell.

"I doubt that will no serve us much, unless we can get some proof apart from you that Ivan Carrach had done something that Falcon meant to deliver him over to the law for. Ye see, as you are the wife of the prisoner, it would be suspected at once that your story was a make-up; and Wattie Todd's evidence would be little counted on. But where is he?"

"He gaed awa' that night seeking Falcon; and his mother, Girzie, is awa' seeking him. I haena seen him since."

"That's worse yet, for little help as he might hae been; it would hae been better than none. Let's see now—has Carrach been seen about, immediately before or on Tuesday, or onytime since?"

"I dinna ken, but the Laird could tell us."

"Just wait here till I come back."

He put on his hat and went out hastily. During his absence Jeanie was busy searching her memory for any hint Falcon might have dropped in their conversation as to the possible cause of his enmity against the skipper. Like a flash of light Falcon's words recurred to her—

"I blame him for all the misfortune that has befallen us."

Why should he blame him? She had just remembered the answer to that question when Mr. Carnegie returned, with disappointment on his visage.

"I met the Laird at the bank," he said, shaking his head, "but he has not seen Carrach for a long while, though he

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believes he is no further away than Ayr, and may be here to-day or to-morrow."

"I believe he's telling a lee," she exclaimed sharply; "but I'll find out without his help. I can tell ye now the cause o' the quarrel between Carrach and Jeamie."

"What was it?"

"Ye mind that the *Colin* was burnt?"

"Quite well."

"Jeamie tauld me that Carrach himsel' had kindled the fire and burnt the brig, though he didna ken what his purpose was. That was what he blamed for parting him and me, and it was for that he said Carrach should swing on the gallows."

"For mercy's sake, Mrs. Gray, take care what ye say," cried the astonished lawyer, "or ye'll bring yoursel' into trouble. Do ye know that this would almost involve Clashgirn himself in a conspiracy to defraud the insurance company. The *Colin* was insured in the office I'm agent for, and it was a considerable loss."

"Then that would be a reason for the Laird telling you a lee about Carrach. Oh, Heaven be thanked, the light is dawning on me now, and I'll get at the bottom o't before many hours are gone."

Mr. Carnegie was trotting about the floor in violent agitation.

"Where are you going?" he asked as she moved to the door.

"To Clashgirn."

"Stop a minute; if we're to make onything by this extraordinary clue, we must handle it calmly. What are you to do there?"

"See Mrs. Begg and the servants, and get out o' them ae way or another whether they hae seen Carrach or no lately."

"I wonder if it's safe to let you go—you might spoil everything if you were to let the Laird guess what you were driving at."

"Hae nae fear. Robin Gray's life is depending on me, and that thought will guide me as cunningly as all your experience could do."

The little man looked at her calm resolute face, and an expression of confidence overspread his own.

"I'll trust you," he said nodding; "it's wonderful what a woman can do when her blood's up. You're a brave woman, Mrs. Gray, and I believe you'll manage this better than I would myself, though I am counted a gey sharp hand at ferreting. Just keep cool, question everything, and admit nothing, and you'll manage it. In the meantime I'll turn up all the facts about the *Colin*, and if the point o' a needle can prick a hole in them I'll do't. Come back here as soon as you can, and if I'm no in, send for me."

Jeanie's heart was throbbing hopefully, and with a light step she took the road to Clashgirn. The clouds were clearing as she thought.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE FIRST STEP.

"Ah, woman, I'll tell ye what I heard yestreen,  
Somebody was someway they shouldna hae been,  
It's no that I'm jalousin' ocht that is ill,  
But we ay ken our ain ken, and sae will we still."

—A. A. Ritchie.

SHE approached the house cautiously. There was a keen frosty wind blowing, and that would have been excuse enough if any one had observed that her plaid was drawn tightly round her and over her head, thus screening her features. The day, too, was already beginning to darken, and that rendered it difficult for any one to recognize her at a distance.

She was anxious to escape the observation of the Laird, at any rate until after she had seen the housekeeper. She passed round to the back of the house and entered by the kitchen door.

Two strapping lassies with red arms were bustling about preparing the luggies and the dishes for the evening's milk. Both recognized her, and both paused in their work, exclaiming, "Hech, sirs!"

"Is Mrs. Begg in?" she asked.

But before either of the girls could reply, Mrs. Begg made herself heard, for she had just entered the kitchen from the lobby.

"What are ye standing there glowerin' at noo, ye lazy tawpies, as if there was nae work to be done in or out o' the house? It's my opinion ye would stand and glower at anither if the house was in a lowe, though ye're no that bonnie either."

"How are you the day, Mrs. Begg?" said Jeanie, advancing to her.

"Hech, sirs, Mistress Gray!—I'm fine, thank ye for speiring; and what in a' the world brings ye this gate?"

"I came ower to speak wi' ye, Mrs. Begg, for there's nae other woman frien' I hae sae near me to advise me except Mrs. Dunbar, and she's auld, ye ken."

Whether Jeanie had intended it or not, her address pleased the good-natured housekeeper of the Laird, by flattering her with the idea that she was a more likely person to apply to for advice in a difficulty than anybody else of Jeanie's acquaintance.

"Aye, aye, and I'm glad to see ye, guidwife, and glad to see that you're no looking sae cast down as I feared ye would be when I heard of Cairnieford's misfortune. But come your ways but the house and we'll get sitting doon. The men'll be enow to their supper, and we couldna weel hae our crack when a'body was guzzling and listening round us."

She gave certain instructions to the lassies about their work, and gossiping all the way conducted Jeanie across the lobby and into a little chamber, which was called Mrs. Begg's room. In this apartment she entertained the friends who might call on her, and here slept, in the usual cupboard-like bed, the door of which being closed during the day, left a space of about ten feet square to serve as parlour.

Jeanie had been several times in this apartment since her marriage, for immediately after that event Mrs. Begg had visited her and claimed her as a neighbour and a particular

friend, for the sake of the liking both had borne James Falcon. The good woman had at the first been inclined to blame Jeanie for marrying so soon after the news had come of her lover's loss; but she became her firm friend and defender against envious tongues after a very brief conversation with her on the subject.

She had begun to speak in a lower tone than she had used in the kitchen as she had crossed the lobby, and the modulation was retained even in her own room, with the door closed. The reason was soon made known.

"Eh, but it's been sad wark," she said, shaking her head mournfully; "whaever is at the bottom o't, it's been sad wark; and there's the puir lad that I couldna hae been fonder o' if he'd been my ain bairn lying up the stair in his coffin—him that I expeckit would hae seen me to my hame."

"Up the stair," exclaimed Jeanie below her breath, and agitated by the thought that she was so near all that remained of the man she had so dearly loved, and whose love had been so fatal to them both.

Mrs. Begg wiped the tears from her eyes, and went on more composedly.

"Aye, just aboon our heads, ready to be buried the morn. He was a bonnie lad, and a kind-hearted ane, and noo I daurna ask ye to take a last look o' him, for the sicht would haunt ye a' the days o' your life. But there's nae use greeting ower spill'd milk; he's gane, puir lad, and he's happy, and that's mair than he ever would hae been here, I think, without you."

"They're surely gaun to bury him soon," said Jeanie, huskily, and not knowing well what to say.

"Aye, it's no usual, and it's scarcely decent to gie the body to the mools barely a day after the breath is awa'; but the Laird's maist in as big a hurry to get him out o' the house, noo he's dead, as he was to get him out o't when he was living. He says the sooner it's a' by the better; and for ance I agree wi' him; for I want to get awa' frae this house, and I'll gang as soon as the burial's by."

"Do ye mean that ye're to leave Clashgirn a'thegither?" queried Jeanie, much relieved by this change of subject, which enabled her to direct her thoughts to the purpose of her visit.

"Deed and I am gaun awa' for a'thegither, an' they'll be clever folk that catch me across the doorstane o' this house again. No, I wouldna bide here noo for a barrow fu' o' gowd" (With all the complacent dignity of one who resists a great temptation).

"I ay thought ye were weel settled. What's gar'd ye change your mind?"

"Everything's gar'd me change my mind, Mistress Gray. The way I hae been used by that hirpling heepocrite that folk ca' the Laird——"

And her tongue, once loosened on that topic, ran on untiringly for an hour, with the details of the indignities to which she had been subjected, and seemed capable of continuing in the same strain for any length of time. She only paused once, to produce milk, bread, and beef, and to insist upon Jeanie partaking freely of them all.

Jeanie had no appetite, but she forced herself to eat for the pleasure of her hostess, and she was refreshed and strengthened by the meal. She listened patiently to Mrs. Begg's tirade, interested because no word could be spoken about Nicol McWhapple now which would not have interested her. Her patience obtained its reward.

"Ye ken that I'm no ane to speak ill o' my neebors without guid cause," proceeded the housekeeper; "but it does seem to me that a man wha locks himsel' up in a room o' his ain house, an' winna see naebody for a whole day, while he's got some ane locked in wi' him, canna be about ony guid wark."

"Did the laird do that?"

"Aye, nae farther gane than Wednesday. Oh, ye needna be scandaleesed, it wasna a woman that was wi' him, but a man."

"And wha was the man?" (holding her breath and trying to speak calmly).

The short winter gloaming had already made the room so dark that Mrs. Begg could not see the eager face which was turned toward her.

"I couldna be sure; but I heard them speaking in whispers like; and at night, when the Laird thought a' body was in bed, he let the man out as quietly as though it had been a robber that he had been helping to rob his house."

"Ye saw the man syne?"

"I got a glint o' him frae the door there."

"And wha do ye think was he?"

"I couldna be sure, as I tauld ye; but I believe it was nae ither body nor that drucken sot Ivan Carrach. Mercy keep's! What's the matter wi' ye?"

Jeanie had stretched out her hand and gripped her by the arm.

"Dinna speak sae loud, Mistress Begg, he might hear ye. Is he in the now?"

"I dinna ken, an' I dinna care whether he hears me or no" (raising her voice to a higher key in defiance of eaves-droppers).

"But whisht ye, hinny, for my sake" (in a low agitated tone). "I wouldna like him to ken I was here, and—oh, Mistress Begg, I can trust you as my best friend?"

"Surely ye can do that," responded the housekeeper, astounded and curious.

"I'll tell ye then. I want to find Carrach—for I think he could gie testimony that would clear my guidman."

"Save's a', what gars ye think that?"

"Did ye no say that it was Wednesday he was here?" she said, without answering Mrs. Begg's question.

"I dinna say it was him, but I thought it was."

"And it was Wednesday?"

"Aye—that was the day."

"And ye didna see him coming in?"

"No—naebody about saw him that I ken."

"Then he might hae come in through the night?"

"Aye, or early in the morning."

Jeanie was silent. That was the morning after the spate—the morning after the crime had been committed. If she could only prove that he had been lurking about the place on that night, and that he had stolen away on the succeeding night like a man who dreaded observation, that would be one great step gained in her purpose. Her conviction of his guilt was now positive, and with much cogency she argued out her course.

The Laird was clearly in some way involved with him; for he had concealed him in the house, and he had denied having seen him lately. No doubt he would endeavour to warn him that from some source suspicion had been raised against him. As he had said that the skipper was likely to arrive on this day or the next, he might arrive at any hour, and the Laird would inform him of his danger, and he would escape.

The way to find Carrach, then, was to watch the Laird.

Mrs. Begg's curiosity had kept her silent for an unusual length of time, peering through the rapidly deepening darkness at her visitor, expecting her to speak.

"I'll get the lamp lighted," she said at last, rising. "I dinna like to sit in the dark wi' him lying up the stair—it gies me a kind o' cauld shiver at every blast o' wind."

Jeanie shivered herself at the reminder of what was so near, but she pressed the woman down on her seat.

"No yet, dinna get the light yet," she whispered. "I'm gaun to ask ye a favour, Mrs. Begg."

"Onything I can do for ye—"

"You will do, I ken. Ye said ye were gaun to quit Clashgirn after the funeral; will ye gang ower to Cairnieford, then, and bide wi' my mother for twa or three days? She's unco puirly now, an' I canna get attending to her while Robin's in trouble. Ye would cheer her up I'm sure, and it would gie ye time to look about ye to see where ye were gaun to bide or what ye were to do."

"I'll be right weel pleased to do that; but is there naething else I can do for ye?"

"Aye, let me bide here wi' ye the nicht."

"I'll be glad o' your company, and syne ye'll hae plenty o' time to tell me a' about your guidman's difficulty, and—"

"But I want ye no to light the lamp, an' no to speir at me my reason for asking this till the morn."

"I'll no speir a single question, though I would like to ken what ye expect. Ye surely dinna think Carrach's in the house yet?" she said, breaking her promise in the same breath which gave it.

"I couldna say, but I can tell ye this, that the Laird's no willing to let us ken where he is."

"Is he no? Then we'll find out in spite o' him," exclaimed the housekeeper, brightening at the idea of being able to do anything to spite her master.

"Can ye find out if the Laird has come hame yet?"

"That can I, and will in a minute."

She quitted the room, returning presently with the intelligence that the Laird had been at home for the last hour. Jeanie thereupon moved her seat to the door, taking a position from which she could command the whole of the lobby when the door was slightly ajar. Her movements were very resolute, although very quiet; and excited the curiosity of Mrs. Begg so much that she kept up a constant fire of gossip, cunningly interlarded with inquiries which, if answered, would have enlightened her as to Jeanie's purpose. But whenever she made any glaring breach in her promise, she good-naturedly checked herself, and confessed that she could not help letting slip a word now and again, for she was really "unco concerned to ken what ye jalouse, and maybe I could help ye mair nor ye think."

In spite of that inducement Jeanie was guarded in her answers, for although she would have trusted anything to Mrs. Begg's kindly intents, she could not trust her tongue.

She was relieved for about an hour, during which the housekeeper was away seeing to the disposition of affairs for the night. When Mrs. Begg came back, Jeanie was in exactly the same posture by the door, listening and watching the lobby.

The servants had all retired to rest, and the house became quiet. Mrs. Begg still talked, but in whispers now, as if the quietude around her impressed her with more caution. She opened the door of her bed, and asked her guest if she were going to lie down.

"No yet, if you please."

"Ye dinna mean that you're to sit up a' night?"

"I do."

"And what guid will that do ye?" (her tone rising).

Jeanie was by her side in a moment.

"I manna tell ye what I'm waiting for, Mistress Begg. I believe that Carrach may come here the night again, and I want to make sure o't. That's the long and short o' the matter."

"Ye might hae told me that afore, and I'm sure I wouldna hae interfered. But I'll no gang to bed either, since that's the way o't. I'll just sit up and keep ye company."

And yawning she seated herself on the side of the bed, whilst Jeanie resumed her place by the door. Mrs. Begg kept awake for some time after her usual hour of going to bed, and would probably have kept awake all night if she had been at liberty to speak. But Jeanie had begged her to keep silence lest the Laird should overhear her—a very probable event in the stillness which prevailed—and her desire to spite him was sufficiently strong to obtain her submission even to that troublesome condition.

The result, however, was that she yawned a great deal, had to check herself often in the act of breaking the rule, and at last, resting her head on the pillow, fell asleep, snoring loudly.

Jeanie calculated that it must be past midnight. It was certainly more than an hour since Mrs. Begg had gone to sleep, when her pulse quickened as she fancied she heard a slight creaking sound as of the handle of a door being cautiously turned.

She bent forward with greedy ears and eyes.

The sound had ceased, and there was a long pause, during which she heard nothing but the rushing of the wind outside

and the snoring of her companion. Then there was a thin stream of light across the dark lobby, and she knew that the door of the Laird's room was stealthily opened.

He stepped out, his hat and plaid on, his thick staff and a small bundle in his left hand, whilst with the right he closed the door. He locked it, for she heard the click of the bolt as it shot into the socket. The lobby was dark again, but she could hear him creeping across it to the front door. He opened it in the same stealthy way as he had opened the other, and stepped out, carefully closing it after him.

She started to her feet, and with swift noiseless steps gained the door. In another moment she was outside.

It was a clear frosty night. There was no moon, but there was light enough for her to distinguish objects at about ten yards' distance. She did not see him at first, as he was passing under the shadow of some trees, but she heard his footsteps crunching the gravel, and that warned her to be careful of her own steps. She sat down on the doorstep, and, panting, removed her shoes. She did not think of the frost or the sharp stones which might cut her feet. Her heart was palpitating wildly with the hope that she was on the track which was to lead her to the proof of her husband's innocence; palpitating too with the fear lest any false step should betray her before she had made the discovery for which she was prepared to brave any danger.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### ON THE SHORE.

"Her look, ance gay as gleams o' gowd  
Upon a silvery sea,  
Now dark and dowie as the cloud  
That creeps athwart yon leafless wood  
In cauld December's e'e."—*W. Thom.*

CARRYING her shoes in her hand, she stepped lightly after him, her eyes noting his every movement, so that if he should

chance to look round the could drop dead on the earth and escape any eternal glances. But whether it was because he was less confident of his security from observation at that hour, or his hurry to reach his destination was too great, he did not pause or turn his head.

He was proceeding at the greatest speed his lassiness permitted. He suddenly turned off the road, passed through a gap in the hedge, and proceeded across the fields. He was moving straight for the shore, which was little more than half a mile distant from the house in a straight line, although it was much farther by the road.

Jeannie divined at once where he was going to when he struck into the fields; and she was satisfied that he was either to meet Carrach or to erect some pre-arranged signal of danger.

She heard the loud swishing sound of the sea as the waves tossed on the beach, and receded, leaving a white track of foam. Then she could see the waters glistening in the dim light, and far out the waves rushing at one another, rising and breaking in dark mysterious forms. Then the Laird's figure became plain to her as he halted on the road which passed along the shore about fifty yards above high-water mark, and which was called the low road.

There, for the first time, he looked about him; she dropped down on her knees and crouched to the earth, watching him still and holding her breath. He delayed so long that she began to fear he had seen her; but at last he moved on across the road and down to the pebbly beach.

Between the road and the beach there was a long track of green hillocks like a range of miniature hills and glens, which was called the Links. The innumerable hollows promised her greater security from detection than any part of the way hither had done, and she advanced boldly.

She had lost sight of the Laird since he had crossed the Links, and she was obliged to select her path carefully so as to move amongst the hollows, lest in crossing any of the mounds *he should chance to see her.*

She came suddenly upon the beach, and saw the man standing with his face seaward, but scarcely more than six feet from her, and she shrank back trembling. The slightest slip of her foot would have made him aware of her presence.

She peered round to find some place from which she might watch him without having to expose her head, and a solitary whin bush growing near the top of the hillock offered her the mask she required. Creeping up behind it on her hands and knees, she parted the stems and looked through the opening.

The Laird uncovered the small bundle he had carried in his left hand : a blaze of light flashed in her eyes and revealed to her that it had been a lantern he had brought to the place covered by a thick cloth that it might not attract the attention of any stray gauger or coast-guardsman—the only persons likely to be abroad at that hour.

He slowly raised the lantern from the ground to his arm's length above his head and lowered it thrice. That done, he hastily re-covered the light, glanced cautiously up and down along the beach and then looked out to sea.

Far across the water Jeanie observed a speck of light rise and fall thrice, as if in answer to the signal.

The Laird drew back to the hillock and seated himself just beneath the watcher's head. She fancied that he was so near that by reaching out her arm she might have touched him. She fancied that, in spite of the rush of wind and the splash of the waves, she could hear him breathe, and she almost stifled herself in her efforts to repress her own breath lest he should hear it, whilst for the same reason she was afraid to move from her unpleasant proximity to him.

She knew that an answer to the signal had been given from Carrach's brig, and she knew that Carrach was coming to him.

She was not insensible to the peril of her position in the event of detection. Alone on that solitary beach with two men rendered desperate by terror of the consequences of the discovery of their guilt, what might they not do, what mad crime might they not dare to commit, to secure themselves ?

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Their lives might be at her mercy if she were to regain her home in safety ; and if that were the case they would not hesitate to insure her silence at any hazard.

The question first occurred to her now, what was she to do when Carrach came ? She was powerless to prevent him going away again, and what value would her unsupported testimony possess to outweigh the oath of the Laird ? No motive could be assigned for his participation in such a crime as that with which she purposed charging the skipper, whilst the strongest motive could be attached to her attempt to prove their guilt—namely, her desire to screen her husband.

She felt sick and disheartened at thought of her peril and its apparent uselessness. If she had only brought Mrs. Begg or somebody with her who could have borne disinterested testimony to it all, she might have secured the object which now seemed so near, and yet so far beyond her power of turning it to account. With dogged tenacity she clung to her determination to see and hear everything. In what manner her knowledge was to be used was a question to be settled afterward.

She heard the dip of oars and their straining sound in the rowlocks. Presently she descried a dark object moving on the water to the shore, and gradually the object took form and she saw a man in a small boat pulling with vigorous strokes through the surf. The keel of the boat grated on the beach ; the man in a slow heavy way got out, pulled the boat half out of the water, fixed a small anchor in the sand and shingle, and then leisurely looked up and down the shore.

He had landed only a few yards west from the point where the Laird was waiting. The latter called, "Here ;" and the man, in his slow heavy way, strode up the beach, his feet grating on the pebbles. The Laird did not rise to meet him, but waited till the man found him, which he was enabled to do with the assistance of another call.

He halted in front of the Laird, and facing the bush through which Jeanie was watching. He did not halt like another man, but rather like a heavy stone which stops when the

impetus has become exhausted. And like the stone he seemed to sink in the ground as if he were never to move of his own accord from the spot again.

"Oich, you was there," said Carrach in his stolid way; "I'll thocht you was no coming you was so long."

"I came as soon as I thought it safe to come," answered the Laird pettishly. "Why hae ye no brought one of your men ashore with you?"

"I'll thocht it was better to settle our matters atween oursel's with nabody else."

"I told you to bring a man with you to witness your putting your mark to the receipt."

"Aye" (rubbing his sunflower head and face slowly with his cuff), "but there was shust two men on board, for I had no time to get hands at Ayr, and I couldna bring one o' them away."

"Ye canna work the schooner with two men only?"

"No; but I'll shust put in at the first port we come to and get the hands we'll want."

"Ye'd better mind where ye put in at, for I warn ye there's nae corner in this country safe for ye. Lawyer Carnegie asked me the day when I had seen ye, and where, and I hae nae doubt that if he get's haud o' ye there'll be sma' chance o' your ever setting foot on board the *Ailsa* again."

The Laird spoke in a sharp uneasy tone; but the Highlander was as little moved by the information on which he placed so much importance as if he had told him that Mr. Carnegie had invited him to take a dram.

"Oich, tha law writers are always wanting to know something. But I'll no care to spoke wi' him ony more. So you'll shust gie me the siller and I'll go."

"You must bring one of the men first to witness your receipt."

"What, go back all the way to the schooner and come here again? You'll no mean that?"

"But I do mean that. Do you think I'm to pay a hundred precious gowden guineas without some satisfaction for't?"

"I'll put my mark."

"That's no enough."

"There was nobody ever said that before, though I have put it to hundreds o' papers."

"That was different: I want to make sure that ye'll no fash me again, and the way to do that is to make ye feel that if ye try it ye'll get the worst o't."

Carrach was silent for a long time, rubbing his cuff over his head and face twice to refresh himself. At length—

"You'll hae them with you?"

"Aye, I got them out o' the bank the day."

"Weel, I'll shust told you my mind. You'll want to make everything right for yourself, and I'll want to do the same. Goot. Then I'll took the siller from you and will give you no marks nor witness at all—pe-tam."

The threat was pronounced without the least variation of his ordinary thick husky tone, being emphasized merely by the customary oath. He did not move from his position; he was so well satisfied that he possessed the power to execute his threat that he was in no hurry.

The Laird, however, jumped to his feet and began backward to ascend the hillock on which he had been sitting, raising his heavy staff to protect himself.

Jeanie, trembling at the imminent risk of discovery in which the Laird's sudden movement placed her, shrank back into the hollow, and began to crawl away.

"If ye touch me, I'll fell ye," shrieked McWhapple, flourishing his staff desperately.

"I'll no like that, for it was no pleasant to be fell—pe-tam. What's yon?"

And with unexpected alacrity he started forward on to the hillock. The Laird, mistaking his motive, aimed a furious blow at him, which, however, fell wide of the mark; the Laird in consequence, losing his balance, rolled down on the shingle. His chagrin at this accident was lost in his amazement at the disappearance of Carrach, and next at the wild frightened scream of a woman which echoed along the shore.

He sat bolt upright, staring vacantly before him, and shivering with vague alarm.

It was Jeanie who had screamed. Stealing away from her hiding-place, she had in her haste to escape miscalculated the height of the mound behind the one she had just quitted, and in passing over it she had become visible to the Highlander.

He, suspecting treachery of some sort on the part of the Laird, rushed after her, and almost before she was aware of being pursued—certainly before she had time to regain her feet for flight—he had seized her by the plaid. She screamed; but she was up instantly, facing him with terror trembling on her lips, and rage flashing in her eyes.

He held the plaid with a firm grasp, and his big bovine eyes rolled all over her in dull wonder and perplexity. The idea which was slowly forming in his mind was that the Laird had chosen a singular mode of betraying him, but decidedly a pleasing companion.

Quick as the thought came, she slipped out of the folds of the plaid and left it in his hands. She fled with the swift feet of terror over the uneven ground.

Carrach was a slow man, slow in thought, and slow in action; but in an emergency which threatened his life, even his dull wit was quickened, as he had proved once already on this night. So he stared stupidly at the plaid which the wind fluttered in his hand, then dropped it with a hoarse growl, and was after her before she had made twenty paces from him.

She was light, and was spurred by fear. He was heavy; but he too was spurred by fear, and he had strength, and the dogged persistency of a man who, being slow to catch a thought, is still slower to relinquish it. He had caught the motion now that it was necessary to his safety to stop the woman, and held on steadily in spite of many stumbles.

Still, it was probable that, aided by the night and the concealment afforded by the many hollows she traversed, that she would have succeeded in eluding him; but her foot struck a stone, and she was pitched headforemost over one of the hillocks. Her head struck the ground, and she lay several minutes stunned.

She was on her feet again, and was somewhat confusedly looking back to see how near her pursuer might be, when his fat dirty hands grasped her arms.

"You'll no do that again—pe-tam," he gasped.

Her whole strength seemed to desert her at his touch, and her limbs shook with the enervation of the strain which had been upon them. She was utterly exhausted and helpless in his hands.

Uttering a savage growl at every step, he dragged her after him back to the place where the Laird still sat, bewildered and trembling under all the horrors which his own cowardice and fears conjured up. As they approached the place, the sharp wind cooled her feverish cheeks, whilst the sense of danger gradually restored her vigour, and she made a sudden and violent effort to release herself. But she was like a child in the clutch of a bear. He just folded his arms round her, pinioning her arms to her sides, lifted her up, and carried her the rest of the way in spite of her despairing struggles. She screamed, he growled, but did not halt until he set her down close to his boat.

As he had passed the Laird, the latter had risen, followed, and, recognizing her, stood cowering in abject terror.

"We're lost—ruined," he whined cringing as if about to drop on his knees and crave mercy.

Dull as he was, the Highlander had no need to ask the Laird how far he was responsible for the woman's presence.

"Hold your whishst, woman—pe-tam," he growled; "you'll shust spoil your voice, and there's nobody to hear your spoke."

He drew her wrists together behind her, and held them fast in his left hand, whilst with his right he took off the thick kerchief which was tied loosely round his throat.

"Put that round her mouth and shut up her noise," he said, addressing the Laird. "Oich, I'll never hear nobody skirl like that before."

The Laird, with trembling fingers complied, passing the kerchief across her mouth twice, and tying it at the back of her head, moaning all the while over the predicament.

Carrach next handed him a knife, from which the Laird shrank with as much dread as if it had been raised to strike him.

"What's that for?" he gasped, with chattering teeth.

And Jeanie, still struggling, felt a cold chill pass over her as if her last hour had come.

"What did you'll thocht it was for?" demanded the Highlander savagely. "Go and cut the rope from the anchor yonder—that's what it's for."

"What are ye gaun to do?"

"Get the rope and you'll saw."

"I'll have no more violence," shrieked the Laird vehemently. "It's a' your fault that I'm in sorrow and trembling this night—a mad fool I was to think that your thick stupid head could ever hae done onything right. But I'll hae nae mair violence—in the presence o' a witness I protest against it."

The selfish alarm of the wretch, which even in that place endeavoured to shift all blame from his own shoulders, produced the singular effect on the stolid skipper of cooling whatever passion he had shown.

"Very goot," he said, in his usual slow way and husky voice; "very goot, we'll took aff the clout that stuffed her mouth, and we'll let her go safe home. Oich, aye, to be sure. She can do no hurt to me, for I'll be away; but you'll see all your friends the pailies, and the provosts, and the fiscals, and the sheriff-offishers all wanting to shake hands with *you* at Clashgirn fine and early in the morning. Oich, yes, let her go, it's all the same one thing to me, and she'll foucht till I'll be tired of her—pe-tam."

"I'll get the rope."

The Laird took the knife, and with nervous haste hirpled to the boat and cut the rope close to the rings. Carrach roughly tied her hands and feet; then lifted her into the stern of the boat with about as much care as he might have used had she been a keg of whisky. His respect could not go farther than that.

"She'll do there," he muttered, seating himself on the

of the boat ; "and now, Laird, we'll shust finish our business. Where's your paper, and I'll put my mark, and she'll be witness to't."

"Her ? What are ye gaun to do with her ?"

"Took her away with me, you said."

"I said ? I never said anything about it—I'll hae nae hand in't."

"Verry goot, we'll let her go as soon as you gie me the siller."

"I'll gie ye the siller,"—(quickly)—“and ye'll better do as ye think best wi' her.”

"Aye, I'll thocht that. I was wanting a wife this long while, and she'll do."

The Laird produced the paper from his pocket which he had previously asked Carrach to put his mark to without a witness, but which he had on this occasion desired to have duly witnessed, with the idea that the formality would impress the Highlander the more deeply with its importance, and so terrify him from any attempt to brave its power. He had also brought with him a pen, a small ink-bottle, and a book to serve as desk.

He uncovered his lantern ; Carrach made his mark with the stolid indifference of his character. The Laird asked Jeanie if she would sign, and by a movement of her head she eagerly consented : first, with the idea that her hands loosened that would be one step gained toward freedom, and second, with the hope that, whatever was about to happen to her now, she might be able to get back and obtain possession of that document, which would be the strongest proof she could adduce of the truth of her narrative of the strange events of this night.

But Carrach only released her right hand, and laying the paper on the seat before her, he rested his hands on her shoulders ready to frustrate any movement she might make.

She signed, he secured her hand again, and held the paper up. The Laird placed a small canvas bag in the boat, and the skipper gave him the receipt.

"They'll be all right," he said, touching the bag with his foot, and his eyes glistened at the clink of it.

"Aye, a hundred gowden pieces"—(mournfully).

"If they're no, I'll come back for the rest—pe-tam."

"If ye ever come within sicht o' me again," cried the Laird, with all the petty venom of his nature finding vent, "I'll gie ye ower to the hangman as sure as I'm living this minute. Whether it harms mysel' or no, I swear to ye I'll do't."

Carrach laughed hoarsely, pushed off the boat, ran into the water up to the knees after it, and then jumped in, taking the oars and pulling out from the shore with long vigorous strokes.

He did not utter a word to the helpless woman, who lay at the stern, or show by any sign that he was conscious of her presence.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### ON THE SEA.

"The white waves heaving high, my lads,  
The good ship tight and free—  
The world of waters is our home,  
And merry men are we."—*Allan Cunningham*.

One feels the loss of a nearly-won victory more bitterly than a hundred defeats in which the tide has been contrary from the start. Jeanie had been so near success this night, had been so near the complete solution of the mystery which surrounded James Falcon's death, that the disappointment of her failure scourged her with sharper pangs than even the dread of what was to become of her could do.

True she had heard no confession, no reference to the event which might not have been easily explained as referring to something else. But she had heard and seen enough to prove that the Laird and Carrach were at the bottom of it all. The former had threatened his companion with the gallows, and he had warned him that Mr. Carnegie was inquiring after him. For what other reason could he have done this than the one she assigned for it—their complicity in the crime? Th

document which the Laird had caused the skipper to sign, that he might hold it as a threat over him, she felt satisfied contained all the information requisite to release her husband.

And yet here she was, out at sea, a helpless prisoner in the hands of the man whose life was at stake. Here she was unable to stir hand or foot, with the waters rapidly deepening between her and any chance of rescue. She had been too much accustomed to the sea from her babyhood up to be disturbed by it now, although the little boat was tossed by the waves with perilous violence.

But what was this dull brute at whose mercy she was placed going to do with her? She had heard him say that he was to take her with him. Did he mean that, or was he only carrying her out to sea that it might close over another crime? He could trust the deep ocean to keep his secret. She shuddered at the thought, and yet oddly as it appeared to herself at the time, she did not feel so much afraid as she had done at first when struggling with him on land. The utter desperation of her position seemed to endue her with calmness and fortitude which surprised herself.

He did not speak; she did not move; and she caught herself counting the dips of the oars with a dull mechanical fidelity, as if she were to calculate by the number of strokes the distance which was being placed between her and safety and all that was most precious to her.

A black mass rose above the water, at first like a cloud, but soon assuming the proportions of a schooner.

The Highlander suddenly ceased rowing, shipped his oars, and bent towards her. She shrank within herself with constrained breath as he touched her. But the fear which affected her was dispelled immediately. Instead of heaving her out of the boat as she had thought he purposed doing, he unfastened her hands, and removed the gag from her mouth.

"You'll no care to jump into the water," he said; "and if you'll do—I'll no care. So you can hae the use o' your arms and feet now."

"He took the oars again and pulled to the side of the schooner. He hallooed to those on board, and a man looked over the bulwark.

"Wha's that?" said the man, as if somebody had knocked at the door.

"Shust me and my guidwife, Donald," responded the skipper; "gie's a hand."

Donald assisted Carrach to convey Jeanie on deck by means of a rope-ladder. She did not make any objection or speak a word of any kind. She obeyed the directions given her quietly and silently. Words could not help her now; cries and lamentations would be worse than useless. All she could do was to submit, and observe every movement of those about for any chance of escape.

She noted particularly, and it was the first gleam of hope she obtained, that the small boat was not hauled up: it was permitted to float astern.

Carrach asked her to descend to the cabin, where she could go to sleep if she liked. She spoke for the first time since they had left shore, and asked him to let her remain on deck. He seemed to be peculiarly willing to humour her, and consented: "it was all the same one thing to him—would she hae a dram?"

"No."

"Very goot, he would hae one himself, and his lads would hae one, and they would all drink her goot health and a pleasant voyage."

He rolled down to his cabin, and before he returned Donald's comrade appeared from the forecastle, where he had been sleeping. Of these two men Jeanie was unable to form any opinion, as there was not light enough for her to see their faces distinctly, and to read there what hope she might have of enlisting their sympathies on her behalf. So far they were nothing more than two dark figures lounging about the deck in the dim light utterly indifferent to her presence, or how she had come to be there.

The skipper returned with a bottle, gave each of his men a dram, and took a double one himself.

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Two things she observed: the double dram, and the fact that he had left below the canvas bag he had obtained from the Laird. She had seen him take it down with him, and she wondered if that canvas bag could help her in her strait. It was a strange thought, quite without shape as yet; but her mind was painfully alert, watching everything.

By the united effort of the three men the anchor was raised, the foresails were set, and the vessel began slowly to move seaward.

When she became sensible of the motion of the schooner, Jeanie experienced a sharp pang at her heart; and she turned her eyes wistfully toward the shore, which melted like a black line into the sky. She was being borne away she did not know whither by a man who had the strongest possible motive for keeping her safe prisoner. She might never see that shore again; or, worse, she might return to it too late to serve the husband for whose sake she had risked so much.

A dreary, hopeless, sickening sensation oppressed her, and she clutched the bulwark by which she was standing to keep herself from falling. The skipper's voice roused her. He was giving some directions to the man who had come up from the forecastle, and whose name she caught—Grainger.

She turned as she heard him mutter some surly response about over-work and the obligation to do double duty in consequence of there not being a proper number of hands on board. He moved aft to the helm.

Here was another straw to catch at: there were only three men on board. She remembered now Carrach mentioning that to the Laird. They must sleep sometime; perhaps only one would be left on deck. Then it would be possible to elude him and to slip over the side into the small boat. Once in it, with a fair start and the night to help her, she had no fear of making her escape. Thanks to the fact that she was a fisherman's daughter, she knew how to handle an oar, and she was devoid of all squeamish feeling regarding the water.

Her pulse quickened with hope as she speculated on this prospect. She was not going to despair yet, or lose precious

opportunity in useless fretting. She had a sacred object to achieve, and at that thought the resolution with which she had tracked the Laird again obtained sway over her. She would be cool and watchful as a tiger preparing to spring on its prey, ready to snatch at the first chance which presented itself.

Her ardour was slightly damped, however, when Carrach approached her and bade her a second time go down to the cabin.

"Can ye no let me bide here?" she said quietly. "I canna walk on the water, so ye canna be feared that I'll win awa'."

"Oich no, I'll no be feared of that at all, or I would no hae left you here this long time; and you'll no care to droon yoursel', as I'll thocht before; and I'll no care if you do, as I'll thocht before too. So you can bide here if you'll like it, and you'll go below in the daylight and sleep when I'll no want you to be seen on deck."

His rough manner again showed a desire to please her in complying with her request, and his eyes rolled with as near an approach to an expression of satisfaction as they were capable of expressing anything.

She did not like the idea; but she had resolved to lose no chance of gaining her object, and in spite of the loathing which his person and the conviction of his crime inspired, she would not cast away the opportunity which this idea promised: if she could satisfy him that she was hopeless of escape, and resigned to her position on board the schooner, half her difficulty would be overcome. She might even carry away with her some proof which would enable her to force a full confession from the Laird. She was already thinking of what was to be done when she reached Portlappoch again, and without that confession she feared that it would be impossible to obtain credence for the wild story she would have to tell of this night's work.

She was still leaning on the bulwark, her face turned shoreward, but observing him with quick furtive glances.

He was standing within arm's reach of her, stolid and heavy

as if he had become fixed to the deck, his eyes rolling slowly over her from head to foot.

"Where are ye taking me to now?" she said, controlling an impulse to shrink away from him.

"Wherever we go."

"Where are ye going to then?"

"I'll not know right yet—the first port we can get hands at."

"Will ye let me out there?"

"No, we couldna do that. You'll go with us."

"What for—what harm do ye fear frae me?"

"I'll not know what harm, and that's shust what for I'll took you wi' me. While I see you here I'll know it was all right; but when I'll no see you nowhere, I'll not know but it's all wrong."

Slow as he might be in grasping an idea, he held fast to it when he had got it, and he had all the cunning instinct of the brute creation where his own safety was concerned. He had shown that in his dealings with the Laird; and he showed it now in dealing with his prisoner, notwithstanding the desire he manifested to humour her.

"Do ye mean that ye're gaun to keep me here ay?"

"Shust that."

"Oh man, what guid will it do ye to keep me awa' frae my guidman, wha's in sair need o' my help, and fras my mither, wha's deeing? Ye canna mean ye'll do that?"

Luckily the dim light did not permit her to see clearly the hideous grin which gradually overspread his features; but she saw enough to understand that she had failed to produce the effect she had intended. She had spoken in the hope of misleading him to the extent of her suspicion of his guilt. But she soon learned that he was indifferent now as to how much she might know or suspect. Having got the notion that she overheard his conversation with the Laird, it was necessary to keep her beyond the reach of any chance of doing him injury, he meant to stick to it.

"Do you'll know," he said, in his slow way, rolling the words in his mouth as if he relished them, "I'll thocht you

was a gootlooking lass, and I'll be goodmans and mithers and fathers and all to you. Yes—pe-tam."

Bravely as she strove to curb all display of her loathing, she could not avoid shrinking back with a shudder.

"Are you cold?" he went on, to her infinite relief, making no attempt to touch her. "Yes, it's a cold night; took a dram and that'll warm you."

He produced the bottle, which, after he had served the men and himself, he had placed in his pocket. She had recovered her self-possession, and she promptly held out her hand, took the bottle, and raised it to her lips. She gave it back to him as if she had taken a hearty draught, although she had not tasted the liquor.

"You'll know what's goot," he said, with satisfaction, "and here's your very goot health."

As she had calculated, he drank copiously, and continued to drink at intervals as he spoke.

"Oich, but you'll hae the braw times, and the braw things to wear. Here's a braw schooner that'll run more fast than anything that's on the sea; and she's all my own, and you'll be the mistress o' her, as I'm the master—your very goot health. I hae siller, too, and we'll go to the West Indies and the Africas, and you'll saw all the wonders o' the world, and we'll make a big lot o' siller out o' the niggers. Oich, it's a fine trade, and you'll hae the fine silks and all the braw things of all the world to wear. Yes—pe-tam. And here's your very goot health again."

He emptied the bottle, but there was not the least perceptible change in his manner. She was disappointed, but his next words consoled her.

"You'll took some more—it's a cold night?"

She assented eagerly.

"Then come doon stair where I'll hae the barrel."

"I want to bide here a wee while yet."

"But it's cold, and I'll hae left your plaid on the shore."

"I dinna heed the cauld—but ye wouldna surely leave the schooner wi' just ae man on deck?"

"I'll forgot that. Donald's tooking a sleep, and I was to keep watch till he'll come up again. Grainger, he was a lazy swine, and will do nothing at all but shust what he'll no can help."

"Hae ye ken'd him lang?"

"Shust got him this morning at Ayr, and I would no had him if there was time to get any one other man, and if I'll know that he was so thrawart—pe-tam—and here's your very—Oich, I'll forgot to go for the ouskie."

He descended to his cabin.

Jeanie immediately ran aft, looked over the stern to see if the small boat was still floating there.

It was gone.

She strained her eyes through the dim light, but there was no speck on the water within the range of her vision. She ran to the sides. But to her dismay the conviction was forced upon her that the hope she had entertained was destroyed. The boat had probably been insecurely fastened, the rope had slipped, and it had gone adrift.

The utter despair of that moment, the sickening sinking of the heart, stunned her.

But it endured only for a moment. A species of frenzied desperation took possession of her, and she stepped up to Grainger.

The man was sulkily attending to his duty, without having once looked toward her.

"Hae ye a wife, Mister Grainger?" she said, in a quick agitated voice.

"Aye, hae ye onything to say about her?"—(surlily.)

"Hae ye ony bairns?"

"Aye, what about them?

"Do you ever want to see them again?"

The man stared in her face, puzzled.

"Has onything gaen wrang wi' them since I left hame?" he asked presently.

"No that I ken, but if ye ever want to see them ony mair, dinna sail wi' this boat."

"What's that got to do wi't?"

"Pe-tam—where was you?" shouted the skipper.

"Listen to what he says to me, but dinna speak or move unless I cry to ye."

She left the man, whose ill-humour had been startled out of him by her singular conduct and words, puzzled and wondering. She ran forward and seated herself on a coil of rope close by the hindmast, which was near enough to Grainger to permit him to hear all the conversation which might pass.

"I'm sitting doon here," she called in answer to Carrach's repeated question as he rolled about the deck seeking her.

"Oich, you was there," he said unsuspectingly, advancing to her. "I'll thocht you was somewhere. Here's a coat that'll keep you warm, and here's twa bottles to keep my ownsel' warm."

She put on the heavy jacket he had brought her, permitting him to help her; and she did not shrink or move when he sat down close beside her. A desperate resolution had grown out of her despair.

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## CHAPTER XL.

"Come under my plaidie and sit doon beside me,  
I'll hap ye frae every cauld blast that can blaw;  
Come under my plaidie and sit doon beside me,  
There's room in't, dear lassie, believe me, for twa."

*Hector Macneil.*

IVAN CARRACH had in his own dull way a certain admiration for female charms, although he had never been a slave to them. Often his calf's eyes had rolled down the street after some trim lass; but the idea of making up to one had never entered his head; or, if it had, he had always been too much attached to his bottle to leave it and carry his idea into effect.

But here was a fine lass whom chance had placed in his way and necessity compelled him to take possession of, by whose side he could enjoy his bottle, and to reach whom he had not

to take one step out of his usual course. Under these auspicious circumstances, he was tempted to play the wooer for once in his life. Hence his readiness to humour her by allowing her to remain on deck, especially as he did not see any possibility of her eluding him.

Naturally those things which appeared most pleasing to his own sight where the things which he fancied would be most pleasing to her. Consequently his wooing took the form of repeated assurances of the "braw gowns and things" he would get her, and a frequent proffer of drams, with a continual drinking of her "very goot health."

Jeanie suffered him to go on without exhibiting any of the loathing he inspired. She answered him quietly whenever it became necessary to make an answer, and she observed eagerly the rapid consumption of the whisky; but she was chagrined to find herself quite unable to detect any change in him. He drank and drank, but there was no apparent effect produced on him.

She began to be alarmed lest Donald should come on deck before she had made any successful movement, and she glanced uneasily at intervals towards the forecastle. But everything remained dark and silent there. Except Carrach's voice she only heard the splashing of the waves against the vessel and the occasional flapping of the sails in the wind.

He suddenly dropped his fat dirty hands on hers. Instinctively she started and drew back.

"What's the matter?" he said; "what did you'll got a start for?"

"Naething—I was just thinking about my folk at hame."

"Then think no more about them if that will make you start so. If you want onything to thocht about, thocht about me."

"I'm doing that."

"What more do ye want then? Shust look this way. I'm going to make a spoke, and you was the first lass I'll ever make a spoke to. Yes—pe-tam."

"When is your other man to be up?"

"Oich, onytime: but it's no about him I'll want to ~~speak~~,

it was about you, and no other body. You was the brawest lass I'll ever saw, and — ”

“ Did ye no say ye were gaun to the West Indies for the slave-trade ? ”

“ Yes, but I was going to say — ”

“ When will ye be back in Scotland again ? ”

“ Never, I'll thocht, unless I loose all my siller and my schooner, and am forced to come back to make the Laird get me another one.”

“ Would he do that ? I heard him telling ye that he would hang ye if ye ever came his road again.”

“ Then we'll shust hang him too at the same time. But we'll no put him to all that trouble if we can help it.”

“ What has he done that you think you could hang him for ? ”

“ That's no matter. I know what I know, and he's too big a coward to do what he said he would. But I was — ”

“ Has it onything to do wi' the murder o' Jeames Falcon ? ”

“ Pe-tam,” growled the Highlander, as if he had been stung, “ Falcon was a brave boy, but he's dead, and I'll want to hear spoke of him no more.”

“ Ye didna like Falcon ? ”

“ Well enough, well enongh, but he was always pushing his nose into other folk's business, and that was a bother. But och, he's dead, and here's his very goot health.”

He took a deep draught from the second bottle, and smacked his lips with satisfaction when he had done.

Jeanie regarded him with a species of terror and marvel combined. The only sensibility he had shown was at the first mention of Falcon's name ; and then he had been moved rather as if an unpleasant personage had intruded on the conversation, than as one startled by a consciousness of guilt. After that first uncomfortable movement, he had spoken in his ordinary slow way, with no other suspicious sign than might be seen in his unwillingness to continue the subject. She was at a loss to reconcile so much imperturbability with such a crime.

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"The Laird didna like puir Falcon, I jalouse," she said presently, glancing over her shoulder, to make sure that Grainger was listening.

"The Laird was shust a tam coward, and was feard o' the lad."

"What for?"

The Highlander raised his dull eyes to her face, as if with some dim motion that she was cunningly trying to surprise his secrets.

"Shust for one thing and another," he answered, drinking again.

She understood his look, and did not press him further on that point.

"I ay understood the Laird was a near man wi' his siller?"—(carelessly.)

"So he was."

"But he wasna that wi' you frae what you hae said. He gied ye a hundred gowd pieces, did he no?"

"Yes, a hundred braw shining guineas"—(with a guttural croak, intended for a chuckle of satisfaction)—"But that was shust because he was a tam coward, as I was told you, and he was feared to say no."

"And ye hae gotten a' the gowd in this ship"—(with affected surprise).

"Yes, all down stair in my locker. That was one reason what for I'll took you away with me, because I'll thocht you might do something to get them taken from me. But he'll be the brave lad and the clever lad that could get them now. Yes—pe-tam"—(another croak and drinking).

The whisky was at last beginning to affect him, so far as to brighten his usually stolid manner with a degree of hilarity. But in other respects he was as deliberate and steady as ever.

Another glance round. Grainger had quitted the helm, and at first she could not make out where he had gone to; but presently lowering her eyes she perceived him stealthily approaching on his hands and knees behind Carrach. Her breath quickened. As she had calculated, the skipper's announce-

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ment of the destination and purpose of his voyage, and that he never intended to return to Scotland so long as the schooner served him, together with the revelation of the golden treasure which was lying downstairs, had roused some mutinous thoughts in the previously discontented mind of Grainger, which would be of service to her in assisting her to escape, if only Donald slept long enough.

"Ye hae got it a' in the locker o' your cabin," she went on; "and do ye think it's safe there?"

"Safe?—to be sure it was. There was nobody here to stole it; and if there was onybody, the locker's strong enough to hold against him; and if it was no, the door o' the cabin was stronger nor twa men. But, pe-tam, I'll want to spoke about yourself."

He attempted to put his arm round her waist. In spite of all her self-control she could not endure that. She started to her feet with a slight cry, springing back and facing him with alarm.

He sat still, staring in stupid surprise at her.

"What was it that you'll be feared aboot?" he said.

"Naething" (trembling and looking about as if seeking some weapon with which to defend herself. She startled, and her eyes became fixed on one object at which she gazed straight over Carrach's head).

"Then come and sit doon again if you was feared aboot nothing. She'll no hurt."

"I canna come," she answered hesitatingly, and still gazing over him.

It was Grainger she was gazing at, and her mind was distracted between the terror of what was to happen, and the doubts whether she should interfere and lose the chance of escape which was opening to her, or leave the besotted skipper to his fate.

Grainger had risen to his feet, a belaying pin in his hand raised as if about to strike on Carrach's head.

A word from her might save him yet: her silence might be his death-warrant. The man paused, either to take surer aim or to make certain that she was not to interfere.

Her eyes were fixed upon him in the fascination of terrified suspense. She could not move or speak; but at a quick upward motion of his arm the horror of what was about to happen—of the thought that she was about to become accessory to a crime as black as that from which she was seeking to clear her husband—overcame all selfish care for her own safety, and she was on the point of shrieking out a warning to Carrach, who was still staring at her in perfect ignorance of the peril so near him, when she was unexpectedly spared the necessity of betraying the man on whose help she counted for release.

Grainger, at the very moment when he seemed gathering his strength for the blow, suddenly wheeled about, flung the belaying pin from him, and walked back with a surly swagger to the helm.

A load seemed to be lifted from her breast, and then she became perplexed, but not afraid now of the Highlander's love-making, for she was assured that very little provocation was needed to transform the steersman into an open mutineer.

At the noise caused by the rolling of the belaying-pin along the deck, Carrach turned himself round in the direction.

"What was you doing, Grainger?" he called.

No answer.

"Did you'll no hear what I was spoking?" cried the skipper, incensed.

"Aye, I hear; what would I be doing but minding the helm?" growled the man.

"You'll make the civil spoke afore very long while—petam."

He turned round again to Jeanie and once more invited her to resume her seat, but with a degree of gruff authority this time.

"Did ye no hear onything?" she said, pretending to listen.

"No—where?"

"I thought I heard the door o' your cabin shutting—is there a key in the lock?"

"Yes. What about that?"

"Gang doon and see ; there's somebody below, I'm sure."

"There couldna be nobdy there but Donald, and I didna see him go doon. But I'll look and fill the bottle again too."

He rose slowly, but quite as steady as usual, and moved toward the cabin. The instant his foot was on the first stair she darted over to Grainger.

"Ye heard what he said ?" she whispered excitedly ; "oh will ye no help me for the sake o' the wife and bairns ye hae at hame ?"

"Help ye to what ?" (surly as ever.)

"To win on shore."

"What for ?"

"Did ye no hear ? That man has done a murder, and I want to win hame to save him wha is falsely charged wi' the death o' James Falcon. Ye'll help me. For God's sake say ye will ?"

"James Falcon murdered—I canna believe that."

She shrank back a step. He seemed to be ruthlessly crushing the hopes his conduct had inspired in her.

"Did ye ken him ?" she asked piteously.

There was a pause. Then growlingly—

"Aye, we sailed in the same ship thegither."

"And was he a friend o' yours ?"

Another pause.

"Aye, a sort o' a friend."

"Then your friend lies cauld and dead, and in his name I cry on ye to help me. He had ay a true kind heart, and if he was your friend ye maun hae ken'd that. He wouldna hae said no to ane that was in sair distress and needing help that he could gie, and surely ye winna say no when I speak to ye in his name."

"It's no sae lang since I saw him safe enuch."

There was no tone of yielding in his gruff voice.

"But I tell ye since then he's been stricken doon—him that was ay brave and ready to help others, was stricken doon in the dark, and ~~yon man's hand~~ struck the blow. Oh, will ye no believe me when I tell ye it my ain man is lying in the jail enow charged."

"I dinna see what I can do for ye."

"I'll show ye what to do for me in a minute, and there's a' that gowd doon the stair."

"Aye, there's the gowd!"

"I'll no say a word about it, and he daurna; sae that ye can hae it a' for yoursel'."

"I'll do what I can for ye."

"God bless ye for that."

She touched his arm gratefully with her hand. She fancied that he was trembling; but there was no time to think of that.

She ran to the cabin stair. There was a light at the foot proceeding from the skipper's room. She heard him tumble against some bottles, and she was about to descend the stair when the door opened, and he came out.

The opportunity she had speculated on seemed lost, but with a quickness which at any other time would have amazed herself, she found an expedient.

"Hae ye looked if the gowd's a' safe in the locker?" she called to him.

"Oich, no, there was no need," he answered, looking up with his hand on the key of the door, which was placed in the lock on the outside, ready for him to turn it.

"Look and make sure," she said.

Muttering to himself he turned back. Her purpose was to lock him in, and then get Grainger to steer for the nearest port. Donald could easily be secured whilst he slept.

She glided down the stair swiftly, noiselessly. She closed the door and attempted to turn the key; but it had become displaced, and in the second occupied in replacing it the door was roughly pulled open, and Carrach clutched her wrist.

"What was you doing?" he said, with that croak of satisfaction. "Was you wanting to lock me up? Shust come in and see how you'll like it yoursel'."

She was so much overcome by this unexpected check to her stratagem, that at first she could not utter a word or cry for help. But as he rudely dragged her into the cabin, she gave vent to a shrill scream.

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"That was no goot," he said, pushing her back; "did you'll thocht I didna see you make a spoke to Grainger? Oich, you was mistook then. So shust sit doon and I'll go and rouse Donald and come back to you. Yes—pe-tam."

And he went out croaking with delight and locking the door upon her.

With another wild cry for help, which she thought Grainger must hear and answer, she dashed herself against the door trying to force it open. But it was strong, as the skipper had informed her when she had hoped to secure him by its aid, and she could not even shake it. She beat her hands helplessly against it with as a little effect as a child's hand might have produced on a rock.

She fancied she heard the sound of a scuffle above, and she became still, listening intently. But if there had been any struggle between the men it was very brief, for it was over before she had collected herself sufficiently to listen.

She heard nothing but the monotonous splash of the waves against the timber, and the occasional rush of the wind as it swept in gusts over the vessel.

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### SUSPENSE.

"Now wae to thee, thou cruel lord,  
A bluidy man I trow thou be;  
For mony a heart thou hast made sair,  
That ne'er did wrang to thine or thee."—*Burns*.

HALF an hour of agonizing suspense, and still Grainger did not come to release her. But neither did Carrach return as he had promised to do, and that was much to be thankful for, if she had not been suffering too acutely to find consolation in anything save positive rescue from the terrors which oppressed her.

By the dim light of the lantern swinging from the ceiling she searched the cabin for some instrument which might have

assisted her to force the door ; but she found none. She returned at last to the door and crouched down beside it, stupefied and wretched. She had been so often that night within arm's reach of success, and she had been so often repulsed, that courage and hope seemed exhausted utterly.

In a dull dreary way she sought the meaning of her desertion. If Grainger had mastered the skipper he would certainly have come straight to the cabin to make sure of the gold. How promptly he had agreed to assist her when she had told him that it would all be his ! What a potent fiend was this gold which could move men to any hazard who would not raise a finger to help a weary heart ! She hated it, and yet a little while ago she had been grateful to it, for it had served in securing the surly Grainger. The ill-gotten store had seemed likely to work its own retribution, and at the last moment it had failed. Might it not succeed yet ?

The question roused her. She had been in that half-waking state when thought passes through the mind by a mysterious and involuntary agency as in dreams. But that short sharp question had wakened her as if a drum had beat in her ear. She could form no idea of how long she had been dozing ; but the lantern was burning dimly and flickering as it swung as if the oil were nearly burned out.

The soft rocking of the vessel, theplash, splash of the waves, and the whistling wind through the rigging, brought to her mind with many sharp pangs the dread reality of all that had passed, the cruel fear of all that might be to come.

She was chilled and stiff, so that she calculated she must have been a long while in the cramped position in which she found herself. She gained her feet with difficulty, and listened for any sound of human voice or movement which might betoken who was master of the schooner.

She covered her face with her hands. There was no gleam of hope to support her. Carrach must have roused Donald and with his help pinioned Grainger. He had not returned to her as he had threatened because he desired to be well out at sea before he again assailed her with his brutish ~~wounds~~.

a phase of his character which she deemed more horrible than his darkest wrath or hate could be.

She started back from the door; there was a footstep on the stair; he was coming at last; she glanced wildly round the chamber; there was nothing with which she might defend herself, nothing with which she might barricade the door.

She clenched her teeth with desperate resolve. The strength of frenzy thrilled through her veins. She felt as if she were strong enough to kill him if he touched her, and she would do it.

The key was inserted in the lock.

She drew back as if prepared to make a furious spring upon him and to gain the deck. There she would be able to find some weapon, and although it would be one woman against two men, it would be a woman who was ready to die. She had forgotten Robin—everything in the madness which possessed her.

The door opened cautiously.

“Are ye there?”

It was Grainger’s voice.

It was well the man spoke. It was well the tone was sufficiently distinct to enable her to recognize it, for in another instant she would have rushed upon him. Her tense-strung nerves seemed to snap, and she sank to the floor weak, sobbing, and hysterical, overcome by the excess of her relief.

“Are ye there?” repeated the man, and then observing her he advanced with singular rapidity and raised her.

“What’s wrang? Are ye hurt? Did he touch ye?”

He spoke with an anxiety and respect which even at that moment surprised her.

“No, no; but I thought it was him coming, and I was ready to strike him dead if I could—and when I knew it was you I got faint wi’ joy. Oh, what way did ye no come sooner, or let me ken that he hadn’t got the better o’ you?”

As soon as he discovered that she was uninjured save by her own terror he placed her on a seat and drew back, hanging his head and answering as surly as ever.

"I thought you would be the better o' a rest, and it was cauld on deck, and ye could hae been nae use there."

"Did ye think o' the fear I would be in?"

"I just thought ye would be better down here nor on deck, and that was a'."

"Where is he then—how did ye do wi' him?"

"Easy eneuch. When he came up the stair I was waiting aboon wi' a rope ready, and I swung it ower him, and had him fast afore he could do mair nor get out a curse."

"Where is he noo?"

"I just drappit him into the hold. I didna want to hurt him mair nor I could help or I would hae felled him yon time on deck—aye, and I'd hae dune't if he had lifted a finger against ye. Lucky for himself sae far he didna do that, and lucky for me too, because I wanted to leave him wi' hale banes for the hangman. Sae, yonder he is noo in the hold without a broken bane, cursin' and swearin' like mad, but no able to steer hand or foot."

"And where is Donald?"

"Barred up in the forecastle. He's been kicking and growling too for the last hour, but I didna heed either o' them."

"What way did ye no come doon to tell me a' that afore? I hae been maist dead wi' fright thinking they had got ye doon as ye hae them. Were ye no anxious about the gowd?"

"Oh—aye—yes. I was anxious about that"—(turning from her slightly as if looking for it, or desirous of hiding from her something peculiar in his manner).

"In the locker he said. I suppose that's it wi' the padlock?"

"Aye, weel,"—(hesitatingly)—"we'll just leave it there for the proper authorities to get it."

"What, are ye no gaun to take it yoursel'?"

"Ye'll need it maybe to help to prove whatever ye want to prove against the man; and I'm content wi' getting safe out o' this boat. Thanks to your warning."

She regarded him now with astonishment mingled with pleasure. She felt more at ease than she had done since she

had been seized by Carrach on the Links. But his generosity puzzled as well as amazed her. She could not understand how such a surly fellow as this could resist the temptation of wealth which lay at his hand for the lifting, merely because he thought it would be of service to her. She knew that it would be of much service in the proof against the Laird and Carrach. She had been willing to sacrifice that in order to tempt this man, and now she felt keenly ashamed of the motives she had attributed to him. Gold did not seem to be so omnipotent over the human heart after all.

"But ye can take it safely," she said, faltering, for she was shy of urging it upon him now.

"No, I wouldna take it, though it was to be nae use to ye."

She held out her hands to him, and as he made no movement to take them she laid them gently on his arm. Again she fancied he trembled, and this time it seemed to be at her touch.

"I ken now," she said with something swelling in her throat, "that Jeamie Falcon was a friend o' yours. Nae honest man ever ken'd him but liked him, and it's for his sake ye are helping me. I canna thank ye as I ought to do; but maybe it will be some satisfaction to ye to ken that Jeamie was ance mair nor all the world to me; and that but for the foul treachery o' yon man Carrach I might hae been his happy wife the-day. Ah, ye'll never ken what cruel sorrow that man has made us sup—Lord grant that ye never may, for then ye would wish that ye had died lang syne as I hae done mony a time."

She wiped her eyes, in which the first tears she had shed since that sad night at Askaig were trembling.

The man made no answer; but his head sunk lower on his breast in a gloomy way, and he backed to the door as if he wished to avoid her sorrow.

That reminded her of the weakness she was displaying to a stranger who could not possibly sympathize with it, and she hastily tried to conceal it, as if it had been a thing to be ashamed of.

"Whereabout are we now?" she asked, trying to speak steadily, and bringing her mind back to the necessities of the moment.

"Come up and see," responded Grainger shortly, and he ascended the stair rapidly.

She followed. There was a pale misty gray in the sky: and a chill wind blowing, which intimated that dawn was at hand. Right ahead she saw two lights.

"What lights are they?" she asked.

"Portlappoch lights, and we'll be safe at anchor in less nor an hour if this wind hands fair."

"Portlappoch?" she cried joyfully; "how did ye ken I wanted to gae there?"

"I just made for the nearest port that the wind would serve for," answered the man, turning away from her abruptly.

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## CHAPTER XLII.

### ANOTHER SURPRISE.

"Life ay has been a weary roun'  
Where expectation's bluntit,  
Where hope gets mony a crackit crown,  
An' patience sairly duntit."

THE wind did hold fair; and whilst the gray mists were still hanging heavy over the village, the schooner anchored in the port. Grainger had hailed a fishing smack, and obtained the assistance of a couple of men to take in sail and let out the anchor.

Before the fishermen came on board he had been assisted in everything he had had to do by Jeanie, who had worked with the energy of a man and the skill of a sailor. But he had scarcely spoken a couple of words to her from the time he had given her the pleasant tidings that she was so near home until now, when he was about to step on shore.

"Ye'd better bide here," he said, "till I send somebody to take charge o' the skipper and his mate, and syne ye can make sure they're safe in the right hands."

He did not give her time for any reply, or to make any question about himself. He left her with the same surly abruptness his conduct had shown to her throughout.

She had little time to speculate on his strange ways, for she was speedily joined by Geordie Armstrong, big with his important share in the current events, and accompanied by half a dozen stout fisher-lads. Apparently he had received full instructions, for, without more than saluting Jeanie, he proceeded to his task. They seized Donald first, and he continued to offer all the resistance in his power, even after he was bound so fast that any attempt to escape was useless. He protested against arrest, as he had committed no crime; but Armstrong paid no more heed to him than to advise him to keep quiet and a civil tongue—advice which was quite thrown away.

Carrach at first resisted with all the strength desperation afforded him; but as soon as he discovered where he was, and in whose hands, he became doggedly silent, and in his bearing exhibited his ordinary stolid composure.

Armstrong left a man in charge of the schooner, and marched his prisoners off.

Jeanie waited until the last, expecting Grainger to return. But he did not come, and so she told the man in charge to bid him follow her to Mr. Carnegie, the writer's, if he should come back, and proceeded thither herself.

Mr. Carnegie was in his little business room or office, at his desk, with two candles shedding a sickly light in the misty dawn, which was creeping in through the window, on the paper on which he was writing with nervous rapidity.

On the other side of the desk stood a sailor-like man, who was answering the various questions the lawyer put in a sharp low voice at every pause of his pen. The man turned his head and stared at Jeanie as she entered. As soon as he had completed a sentence, Mr. Carnegie looked up too.

" You're early afoot, Mrs. Gray, but I'm glad to see you. I suppose you have learned something?"

She reported the extraordinary result of her visit to Clash-

girn. At the first mention of Carrach and the schooner the sailor stared and eyed her curiously, but he did not speak. The lawyer, with his pen in his mouth, his elbows resting on the desk, and his head on his hands, listened without once interrupting her.

"You have had a lucky escape," he said when she had finished, "and a most extraordinary adventure. But I'm no astonished. I think I never will be astonished at anything in the world after this business. I'm glad you're safe through, and I'm glad you have gotten Carrach fast. And now you has gotten him, I suppose you mean to charge him wi' the murder of James Falcon?"

"What else would I do?"

"And where's your proof? for, let me tell you at once, that although there are many things suspicious in what you have told me, there is nothing that in the least connects him with the murder. Then, where's your proof?"

She looked dismayed, but presently answered with decision.

"That we'll get from the Laird."

"That you'll no get from the Laird or onybody else," rejoined the lawyer firmly, as if it were a satisfaction to his legal mind to be able flatly to contradict even his own client—"supposing the Laird was willing to help ye instead of opposing you, he could not give you the proof if what this man says be true."

She turned upon the man angrily.

"And what is it he says?"—(she could only think that he came to bear witness against Robin, and that his evidence had been strong enough to affect even her agent.)

"He just says the most astounding thing that was ever spoken on earth," said Mr. Carnegie, laying down his pen and giving the desk a rap with his knuckles, to emphasize his words and express his indignation at the idea of an enigma being presented to him which he could not solve, "he says that James Falcon has cheated us a second time, and that he's no dead ava."

Jeanie looked in bewilderment from one man to the other.

"What do you mean?" she queried at length.

"That's just what I would like to know," ejaculated Mr. Carnegie, fidgetting with the indignation of one who has been hoaxed; "did you ever see this man before?"

"I dinna mind."

"Aye, well, his name's Hutcheson; he was the mate of the *Colin*, and he comes to me this morning to say that he has been with Falcon in Ayr for the last two days; that he only parted with him yesterday afternoon to come here to me by Falcon's order, and that Falcon himsel', instead o' lying a corpse at Clashgirn, is in hot pursuit of Ivan Carrcah."

"Wha is't, then, that's lying there?"

"I'm fairly at my wit's end to guess. Everybody said it was Falcon."

"Did you see the body?"

"No"—(shuddering).

"Could you bear to look at it?"

A pause. Then—

"If it shouldna be him, would my guidman win clear?"

"I could not answer that, but certainly it would be much in his favour if he should prove to be some one whom he had no motive of harming."

"Then I'll look at it, and I'll force the Laird to explain a' that is sae dark."

"I wish ye may. I'll be ready to go with you directly; I have just to settle one or two things about Carrach first."

"You'll no let him free?"

"No; although we cannot charge him with the murder, we can keep him fast on another charge. Hutcheson declares that, believing Falcon to be dead, and believing that his unsupported testimony as to the manner in which the *Colin* had been destroyed would only bring himself into trouble when opposed to the oaths of the skipper and the rest of the crew, he took a ship at Liverpool instead of returning home. But having now found Falcon alive, and, acting under his direction, he has come to me to declare what he knows of the event. In support of what he says there is one strong proof; namely, that the ~~written statement~~ which was presented to me by Carrach and

signed William Hutcheson was never emitted by this William Hutcheson, some time mate of the *Colin*, and is consequently a forgery. Aha, we'll bind him tight enough on that count."

"Where is Jeanie Falcon?" she queried, still doubting, "and why does he no come here?"

"He'll no come here, mistress," said Hutcheson, speaking for the first time since her entrance. "When I parted wi' him yesterday afternoon, he bade me go back to Ayr as soon as I had made my statement to Mr. Carnegie, and to stop at the inn till I saw him again or heard frae him. Mr. Carnegie was to come to Ayr if he wanted to see him, for he had promised never to set foot in this place again."

Jeanie's face flushed.

"Do ye no ken where he is now?"

"I couldna say"—(awkwardly)—"but I can seek him if ye like."

"Seek him, then, and tell him that it was me that begged and prayed him, for the sake o' a' that's gane and past between him and me, to come back and save my guidman, wha lies in jail on his account."

"I'll do your will."

"Bring him here to Mr. Carnegie's. If it be true that he's living, he'll come when ye say that it was me wha sent for him."

"Sign this, Hutcheson," said Mr. Carnegie, "and then seek Falcon, and bring him here as quick as you can. We must have him here. That's the first thing you have got to do; and the first thing we have got to do, Mrs. Gray, is to learn who it is that has been murdered, and how the mistake of his identity has been made. Where is the man Grainger? We must keep him here till the fiscal comes."

Jeanie could not tell where he was, and a messenger was despatched in search of him. Hutcheson departed, promising to return as soon as he should meet Falcon, or learn his whereabouts.

She was too eager to take the next step in the strange journey she was making—a journey which was distracted by

so many unexpected turns and mazes, and the end of which was yet so dark—to think of rest. The lawyer, however, was not a man to forget such a material element of life as breakfast; and so he presently folded up his papers, laid down his pen, and invited Mrs. Gray into the parlour, where his morning meal was waiting for him.

"I can neither eat nor rest," she said, "until something has been done to gie me assurance o' Robin's safety."

"Aye, but you'll try to do both. When there's serious work to be done, Mrs. Gray, ye should never set about it fasting. Hunger, though you may not feel it, or ken how it works on you, shortens the temper and the patience, and for that very reason weakens the judgment, and loses the thread o' the argument that might lead to the conclusion you want. You will have need of both cool reason and patience, so come awa' ben and lay the foundation o' them wi' a hearty breakfast."

He led her into the parlour, and if she did not make a satisfactory repast it was not her host's fault. When they had finished, he rose—

"Now," he said kindly, "you'll rest here till I come back. I'm going to see Carrach. I must be candid with you, and beg you not to expect too much from what we have learned. What this man Hutcheson says, although it makes the business of the *Colin* quite clear so far as the skipper is concerned, scarcely affects McWhapple, for we have nothing to show that he had entered into a conspiracy with his skipper, except the inference that he was likely to have done so, as he was the greater gainer of the two in the destruction of the brig. But that is mere inference."

"Carrach will confess."

"I hope he may. But then as regards your guidman, Hutcheson's news just raises more difficulties about it, and there were enough before, I'm sure. I confess honestly that I'm more puzzled how to proceed in this matter than I ever was in the whole course of my experience."

"But surely, sir, when they find that Falcon is living, they canna make out ony reason for my guidman wishing to harm ony other body?"

"Would you like to ken what the fiscal would say to that? He would just gie one o' his cheery smiles that seem to me ay to be deluding folk wi' the notion that he's only speaking in fun when he's in dead earnest, and he would tell you that there has been a man killed and not by an accident. Robin Gray was the only man known to be about the place at the time except Robert Keith. Against the latter there is nothing to raise suspicion; against the former everything testifies. Whether a motive for the crime is discovered or not, we must have some better proof than his own assertion that his was not the hand that throttled the man, and then heaved him over the precipice, before the evidence against him can be upset. That's what the fiscal would say."

Jeanie sighed.

"Very well, sir (quietly), we will hae to find the better proof that's needed."

The lawyer regarded her admiringly, and pityingly too.

"Nothing daunts you?"

"Nothing could daunt me but seeing him on the scaffold, kenning that he, innocent, was to die the death o' shame, and I, his wife, had failed to save him."

There was such a radiant light of love and faith over her simple upturned face that the old man felt his blood tingle with admiration.

"Ods, my life, I never thought there was so much endurance in a' the women in the world. It'll no be my fault if we fail. I'll be back as quick as I can; and I'll get the gig brought to the door, so that we can start the minute I'm ready. A' that has been said just brings us back to where we started: before we can move a step we must learn who is the dead man."

"Before ye gang, Mr. Carnegie, tell me ae thing: supposing that Mr. Hutcheson had someway made a mistake, and supposing that it *was* Jeanie Falcon that was killed, would no what ye hae learned about the *Colin* help to shift suspicion frae my guidman?"

"Of course it would."

An hour elapsed before he returned. He found her pacing the floor with flushed and excited face. She greeted him with a cry of joy.

"I ken it a', sir, I ken it a' now," she cried.

"How—what?"

"The body that was found the folk a' said was Jeamie Falcon's," she went on rapidly, "they believed it was him, sae that there must have been something about it to make them so sure."

"Yes, what then?"

"Carrach went to Askaig by stealth to kill Jeames Falcon, and in the dark mistook this man for him!"

She looked at him, her eyes bright with the enthusiasm of discovery and conviction. A pause. Then—

"That may be," he said thoughtfully; "but say nothing about it at present. The argument cuts two ways, and might be used against as well as for Cairnieford."

"Hae ye learned naething frae Carrach?"

"Naething; he's as dour and speechless as a Highland stirk; he comes of the breed."

"We'll find a way to gar him speak yet," she ejaculated, determinedly, and accompanied her friend to the door where the gig was waiting.

As they were seating themselves, the lad who had gone to seek Grainger came back with the intelligence that the man could not be discovered anywhere in the town.

"Odd," muttered the lawyer, and drove away.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

"Hear ye the heart-sick soun's that fa'  
Frae lips that bless nae mair;  
Like bieldless birdies when they ca'  
Frae wet wee wing the batted snaw,  
Her sang soughs o' despair."—*W. Thom.*

As they neared Clashgirn they became aware that some unusual occurrence was going forward. Groups of men,

whose sombre garments and still more sombre countenances intimated that they had come to attend the funeral, were standing about discussing some topic of more than ordinary interest, and one associated with the house, as their frequent glances toward it showed. There was a goodly gathering already, and all had not arrived yet; for James Falcon had been much liked by the country-folk, who felt it to be a duty—whether invited or not—to pay him the last testimony of their good-will by following his body to the grave.

Many salutations were given to the lawyer as he drove by, but none offered to stay him or to explain the subject of their gossip. As they descended at the door, which was wide open, a man took the reins of the horse and said in a low tone—  
“Ye’d better just gang ben, Mr. Carnegie; for I dinna think ye’ll see anybody to ask ye in the noo.”

They entered and encountered Mrs. Begg, who was descending the stair crying and wiping the tears from her eyes with her apron as fast as they rose.

“Eh, Mistress Gray!” she exclaimed the instant she caught sight of her, “what gar’d ye gie me sic a fright? What did ye gang awa’ for without telling me?”

“I’ll tell ye a’ about that anither time—hae they nailed doon the—coffin yet? I want to see him that’s in’t.”

“For guidness sake dinna gang up the stair enow—ye’ll never get the better o’t. My head’s in a reel, and Girzie Todd’s came and turned a’ thing and a’ body tapsalteerie. I dinna ken what’s gaun to happen neist, but surely the world’s coming to an end. I wish we may a’ be forgien, but it’s an awful thing to think o’, and—”

“Come up,” interrupted Mr. Carnegie briskly.

Without giving Mrs. Begg time to explain her incoherent ejaculations, he hastened up the stair and Jeanie followed him.

From the chamber at the head of the staircase issued low moans as of one in agony. He pushed open the door, and they entered. But the spectacle before them brought them to an abrupt standstill when then had barely crossed the thresh-

old. At the farthest corner stood the Laird behind a chair, which served as a support for him in the absence of his staff. His pale foxy eyes were blinking excitedly at the intruder; and with his hands he gesticulated wildly to him (from his position he only saw Mr. Carnegie at first) as if warning him to retire. But as soon as he caught sight of Jeanie close behind the lawyer, his hands dropped heavily on the chair, and he blinked at her with a blank scared visage.

When he had been warning Carnegie he seemed afraid or unwilling to speak lest he should disturb the second person in the chamber; but when Jeanie showed herself he seemed unable to speak.

A little nearer the door the coffin had been placed on four chairs—it was too long to fit into the box bed. The lid had not yet been nailed on; the covering had been torn down, and across the ghastly remains, the arms clutching the sides of the shell with a fierce grip, lay a woman moaning piteously. Her hair dishevelled, her clothes disarranged, the eloquent negligence of her position and ignorance of all that was passing around her, indicated what paroxysms of anguish she had passed through.

It was Girzie Todd, and, like all' strong natures, when once abandoned to grief, it became terrible to hear her alternate childish complainings and bursts of fury.

"Aye, aye, what was an auld fisherwife's brat to them?" she was sobbing in low hoarse tones; "what did they ken or care that ye was day and sun and life to her? My ae lamb, my bairn, my bairn. . . . Can ye hear me noo? Do ye ken that I'm crying to ye, and will ye no say a word to me? . . . Dawnie will miss ye sair at supper time—and oh, what a toom world ye hae left to me. . . . And the folk dinna care; they'll glower at me, maybe, but syne they'll just gang on wi' their wark as though there was naething wrang. Wattie, my bairn, in dule and shame ye cam'; in dule and shame ye hae been taen awa', and naebody minds that ye're dead but your mither."

Her son's voice was the only further utterance for a few minutes.

but it will be the ~~misfortune~~ a sa-geed  
aile to have a bairn.

And I will tell ye some stories now  
as good as they are true and honest now or ye  
lives. As in truth the last will be the ~~best~~ thing  
greatest. But a bairn wi' the boon to have the  
earliest o' the day, there is no ~~surprise~~ ill see the  
other day. And this is my ~~advice~~ to look on  
less o' an early bairn.

The bairn said "Then e'nt I ~~turn~~ the  
watering can wi' me to wash away the river  
now? or do you thin he might be ~~stricken~~ he would not  
have the ~~strength~~ o' a man."

"I am not haeing ~~concerned~~ wi' the hand sweat  
now. He will ride a bairn o' ~~any~~ country was east or  
west. I'll ~~turn~~ the water to you in ~~the~~ warmest pleasure,  
though it's you an' your man's been truly born to death!  
It is, ye understand, the case that the woman does ill-work  
is significaunt and the bairn is rebuked under her."

And in due ~~season~~ ver like as the lassie I mentioned a heap  
of the ~~unseen~~ bushes when she living here. The bunch  
wasn't up to them and the bairn managed to get  
between, as the bairn lived beside the bairn. Knocking the gar-  
ments, and scaring the bairn as if they had been living  
in ~~days~~. She had not yet observed the presence of Mr. Carnegie  
was ~~there~~.

"The bairn is ~~recessed~~ in her now, and touched her on the  
~~shoulder~~:

"Friend," he said kindly, "I have heard what you were  
sayin'."

"But the woman's demented wi' her sorrow," shrieked the  
laird, "ye cannot believe a word she says."

Grazie turned on him fiercely.

"Why can he no believe what I say? Are ye feared that  
I mean to speak ~~anything~~ false you? or are ye feared yet that  
folk should hear that the pair daft Wattie was your bairn?  
I would skirt it frae no end o' the toon to the other if I wasna  
made almuind for his father nor I ever was for him."

"She's raving—"

"Raving?—ye say that" (with a bitter laugh), "I was raving ance and daft tae; that was when I believed ye was an honest man. But that's twenty years syne, and in a' that weary while I hae never sought bite or sup frae ye for me or my bairn, nor hae I ever tauld the folk what a fause leeing hypocrite I ken'd ye to be. It's no worth my fash to do't noo. I scorned the siller that ye would hae gien me to gang awa' frae the place lang syne, and I would do't again. Aye, I would stап these hands atween twa mill-stanes afore I would let them touch a bodle's worth o' your gear."

"Never heed the Laird or the bygane just now, Girzie," interrupted Mr. Carnegie. "Let them rest for a minute, and see if you can be calm enough to answer me a few questions."

"Oh, aye, I'm calm eneuch, but is't no a queer thing, Mister Carnegie, that ony woman in her senses could ever hae thocht twice about sic a shiverin' creatur' as yon, that winna even steer a foot when he kens his ain flesh and blood has been murdered. But it's true though" (with a harsh bitter laugh). "I ance believed in him, and lippened to him, and got the reward I micht hae expected. When he got to be Laird, he couldna marry a puir servin' lass, the dochter o' Hieland fishers, though she was the mither o' his bairn. But he would hae gien me siller to gang awa', sae that the session micht never get word o't, and he micht marry some braw leddy, aiblins. But I bode here and I held my tongue just for the pleasure o' torturin' his coward soul wi' the sicht o' me. The langer I held my tongue the mair feared was he, and he daurna marry as he wanted, just because I was watchin' him. Oh, it was some satisfaction for the wrang he had done me to ken that he was under my thoomb, and that ony day I could shaw the folk what a black knave he was, although I would hae been sair shamed to own that sic a creatur' was the father o' my puir Wattie that's lying cauld and mangled there. O Lord, *he* has been sair punished for the sin that wasna his, and through him, me, and aiblins through us baith, the man wha wranged us."

the first time in the history of the world, the  
whole of the human race has been gathered  
together in one place, and that is the  
present meeting of the World's Fair.

1. The following table gives the number of cases of smallpox reported in each State during the year 1802.

He was a man of great energy and determination, and he had a clear vision of what he wanted to achieve. He believed in the importance of education and in the power of knowledge to transform society. He was a strong advocate of democracy and freedom of expression, and he fought tirelessly for these principles. He was a man of deep faith and a strong sense of purpose, and he lived his life with a sense of mission. He was a true leader, and his legacy will continue to inspire and guide us.

"...the damage remained. We learned  
that we had been a mistake in  
our judgment. Now tell me how do you  
explain this?"

"How I wish I could have kept my pair  
but they had broken into pieces."

*"I suppose when would you have known him—was there any mark on his person, any sign by which you could have distinguished him without the help of his features?"*

"He was my bairn, I tell ye; isna that eneuch!"—  
(doggedly.)

"For you, Girzie, no doubt, more than enough, but not enough for the law in the face of the evidence of several persons that it was James Falcon."

"It was the claes they they looked at, no the man. Did ye think they would look at him as I hae done?"

"Then you admit that the clothes were Falcon's?"

"Aye, nae doubt o't."

"Then how could he come to be dressed in another man's clothes?"—(This with a degree of the satisfaction a cross-examiner experiences when he thinks he has pinned a witness.)

"I dinna ken and dinna care. A' that I ken is that this morning I found up by at Askaig thaе claes that are lying at my foot, and they were Wattie's, sae that he couldna hae had on his ain, and maun hae had on some ither body's."

"Come, Girzie, try to be calm for his sake, and tell me exactly how you came to make this discovery. You went away two or three days ago to seek Wattie; that was before the body was found. Now, begin there and tell me all about it."

"I gaed awa' on Wednesday night to Ayr, kenning that Falcon would gang there to sail for the south, and believing that Wattie was alang wi' him. On Thursday morning I found out that a boat had sailed for England on the Tuesday, and there wasna another to sail for an English port till the-day."

"Now we're getting at it properly. You may be sure, Girzie, I would not harass you this way if it could be helped; but it is positively necessary that we should be certain this time as to the identity of the man."

"I ken'd that he couldna hae sailed on the Tuesday, and that unless he gaed by the coach or went on to Stranraer, he couldna be out o' the toon. I gaed to the coach-office, and he hadna travelled that way, for they hae the names o' a' the folk in a book. I wandered aboot the town seeking him and my laddie, but I couldna hear onything about ane or ither till yester-e'en."

"Well, what did you learn then?"

"I fell in wi' a chield ca'ed Hutcheson, who was since ~~mur~~  
o' the *Cylin* that was burnt, and he tauld me that he had just  
parted wi' Jeanie Falcon, and that my laddie wasna wi' him and  
hadna been wi' him. Hutcheson ken'd that, for him and Falcon  
had been biding thegither frae the day afore. I waited nee  
langer nor to ken that Hutcheson was coming to our toon the  
day, and that Falcon was to meet him again at Ayr. Syne I  
started for hame, thinking I might find Wattie there."

"You started last night?"

"Aye; but I had travelled ower far as it was, and was clean  
forfauchen, sae that I lay down by a dykeside, and couldna  
move till a cottar found me and took me into her house,  
whar I bode a' night. This morning I cam' in by Askaig,  
thinking I might find some news o' him there. Rab Keith  
told me about the murder o' Jeanie Falcon, as was thocht.  
But my heart misgied me, for I ken'd that Falcon was living.  
I gaed to look at the place where the man had been thrown  
over the *Bite*, and coming back to the road we passed the  
shed that was blawn down. Rab had been clearing awa' the  
timber, and in a place he showed me he had just found this  
morning a bundle o' auld claes. They were lying there yet,  
and when I saw them I ken'd they were Wattie's, and I  
jaloused mair and mair that it was him had been got in the  
burn."

"What did you do?"

"I speired whar the body was, and came here to find that  
what I feared was ower true, that it was my laddie, wha never  
harmed living creature, had been struck doon. There was his  
hand, I couldna mistake that wi' the wart on the left thoomb,  
and there is a pickle o' his bonnie hair. If the folk that said  
it was Falcon hadna been misled wi' the claes they would hae  
minded that Falcon's hair was far darker nor that."

"You have just given us the very proof that was wanted.  
Now, Mrs. Gray, perhaps you can recollect what clothes Wattie  
had on when you last saw him at Askaig?"

Jeanie had been standing all this time on the threshold,  
listening and observing the Laird, but not advancing because

of the sickening thought of what lay in the coffin, the top of which she could just see. Behind her was Mrs. Begg, who had been ordered out of the room by the Laird when he had dreaded the coming disclosure. He had done so with sufficient spleen to cause her to go downstairs crying; but she had immediately followed the visitors up again, and her horror and indignation at the revelation of her master's baseness (mingled with thankfulness that she had escaped the union she had some time coveted) were with difficulty restrained. Only the fear of being driven downstairs a second time and missing what was to follow enabled her to control her tongue.

Jeanie hesitatingly advanced two steps into the room, with eyes averted from the coffin. Girzie, from whom she had hitherto been concealed by the open door, observing her now, started up, with a return of her fierce bitter manner.

"Oh ye're there, Mistress Gray," she cried. "Come awa' ben, woman, come awa' ben and see the fine handiwork o' your guidman. Eh, but it'll be a braw sicht to see sic a sturdy chield swinging in the air, and ye'll be at liberty to marry Jeamie Falcon yet for nae mair cost nor the life o' daft Wattie Todd."

The cruelty of this speech rendered Jeanie dumb for the moment. But then recovering herself, she turned upon the distracted mother with indignation that overwhelmed all commiseration.

"Wha says that Robin Gray is to blame for this? and what would he meddle wi' your son for—him that was ay a guid frien' to baith o' ye?"

"Oh I ken a' about it. He didna think it was my Wattie he was dinging ower the crag; but whether he thocht it or no he'll hing for't. I ken noo what he was in sic a sair way aboot, and what he was in sic haste to win awa' for; but we'll send him on a langer journey nor he expeckit."

"Toot, toot, Girzie," interrupted the lawyer sharply, "you must not take the whole business of judge and jury into your own hands this way, when the affair is puzzling cooler heads than yours. Just never heed her, Mistress Gray, ye see she's

distracted with what has happened. Tell us all about the clothes."

"I couldna say what clothes he had on. I was ower muckle fashed at the time to notice onything o' the kind. But let me tell ye, Girzie, that my man had nae mair ado wi' this wicked wark nor ye had yoursel'."

Girzie laughed a harsh mocking laugh.

"Wha do ye think had to do wi't syne?"

"Speir at the Laird there, whase guilty conscience keeps him trembling like a strae in the wind. He kens wha did it and how it was done."

"Him!" shrieked Girzie.

"Aye, him. Do ye no see the guilt o't in his face?"

And true enough there was a ghastly terror expressed on his sallow visage as he rose to his feet, his lips moving as if he were about to offer some defence, but no sound coming from them.

Girzie strode up to him, griped his arm savagely, and glared at him.

"Is this your wark?" she said hoarsely, dragging him close to the coffin.

It was a critical moment for him: Jeanie and the lawyer were watching him; and Girzie was noting every quiver of his features. But as if the enormity of the charge brought against him had restored all his cunning wits to their proper balance, he suddenly became the most collected person in the room.

"Mr. Carnegie," he said quietly, "would ye oblige me by crying up some o' my loons till we get this woman taken care of. She's no fit to be at liberty, that's clear; and as for Mrs. Gray, she's either losing her senses too, or she's been very much misled by her suspicions."

"Is this your wark?" repeated Girzie darkly. "Has the father's hand taen the bairn's life, and is the sin committed sae lang syne to be brought hame to us at last in this awfu' way?"

"I'm sorry for ye, Girzie, and I can excuse ye a heap on

account o' the wrang I did ye ; but I would hae made amends for it if you would hae allowed me. But we'll let that pass, and I'll answer your question just because I'm sorry for ye, and would satisfy you if I could. I had nae hand in this dreadful deed."

He spoke with so much meekness, and with such an air of sorrow for the bereaved mother whilst admitting the truth of her previous statement, that it seemed impossible to doubt him. Even Jeanie was staggered.

Girzie with some dim recollection of the old superstitious test of a suspected murderer's innocence by causing him to touch the body of the victim, when, if guilty, the blood flowed afresh, but if innocent there was no change—released his arm, and said sternly—

"Place your hand on his breast, and swear before Heaven that ye had nocht ado wi' this by thocht, or word, or deed."

A scarcely perceptible shudder passed over him, but he instantly complied.

"To please ye, Girzie, I'll do that, though it's a ridiculous thing even to want me to do't. There, my hand is on his breast, puir lad, and I had nothing to do with his misfortune. I declare it solemnly, as I hope for mercy."

There was a brief silence, through which only [the heavy breathing of Girzie was heard. Her eyes were fixed upon him with a wild stare, marking how much she would have liked [to believe, and yet how much she doubted even this solemn declaration.

"Aye, ye can say that about Wattie Todd," broke in Jeanie, passionately; "but ye couldna and ye daurna hae said if it had been Jeamie Falcon that was lying there."

"And why no, Mistress Gray? Why would I no hae daured to deny this ridiculous charge if it had been Falcon that lay there? Falcon, the puir friendless bairn that I brought up at my ain expense, that I looked on wi' as muckle regard as though he had been my ain, and wha I was meaning to make heir o' Clashgirn and a' I possess, as your friend, Mr. Carnegie, can testify."

"That's true," said the lawyer, as if remembering an important fact he had quite forgotten. "On Thursday, before anything was suspected of this business, the Laird gave me instructions to draw up his will in favour of James Falcon."

"And I would think," added the Laird, with a complacent dab of the head, "that fact will be accepted as some proof that I could hae had no thought of harming the lad."

Again Jeanie was staggered. She had expected to surprise him into confession, or at least some explanation which would betray his knowledge of the crime; and instead of that she seemed to be only bringing to light proofs to confound her own convictions. She could see that both Girzie and Mr. Carnegie were impressed by the Laird's last words. But, with a sort of instinctive logic, her mind presently grasped the one assailable point of this evidence.

"No," she cried, her face flushing with fancied triumph, "the fact will be accepted as proof that ye ken'd what had happened before onybody else, and that ye just gied orders for your will to turn a' suspicion awa' fra ye—"

"Mistress Gray—"

But she would not be interrupted—

"Aye, ye may weel haud up your hands and look horrified, for ye ken I'm speaking the truth. What would ye harm the lad for? ye say wi' your fause tongue. Because he ken'd how the *Colin* was burnt, and baith you and Carrach were feared for your lives. If that wasna sae—if the murder o' that puir lad that was mista'en for another doesna lie atween you and Carrach—what was the meaning o' your stealing awa' like a thief frae your ain house last night to meet him on the Links? What was the meaning o' your paying him a hunder pieces o' gowd, and threatening that if he ever came back ye would deliver him ower to the hangman? What was yon paper ye gar'd him put his mark till and me sign my name on? and what did ye allow him to carry me awa' for when ye found out that I had been watching ye? What for, but that the guilt on your conscience made ye ready for ony deed that might hide it."

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Girzie had been standing with darkly troubled visage, glowering alternately at the Laird and Jeanie. At the mention of Carrach's name she had started, shuddering, and a light had seemed to flash over her face.

"Ivan Carrach!" she now ejaculated hoarsely, "he is my brother—whar is he?"

Jeanie was too much excited to notice the new source of surprise and complication in Girzie's announcement of her relationship to the Highlander. She answered triumphantly, for she fancied the answer would shake the Laird's last support, and her eyes were fixed on him steadily the while—

"He's a prisoner, fast bound, in the care o' Geordie Armstrong."

Girzie stood an instant gazing blankly at the speaker; then, clenching her teeth, she strode out of the room, not looking to right or left, not even giving a parting glance at the coffin.

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#### CHAPTER XLIV.

##### BAFFLED.

"Like a saint sincere and true  
He discovered all he knew,  
And for more there was no occasion."  
*Jacobite Ballad.*

GIRZIE's interruption had given the Laird a breathing space. When first made aware of Carrach's arrest, his weak eyes had blinked a little more than usual. But that was all; for he had been expecting to learn that some accident had befallen the skipper from the moment he had seen Jeanie at the door. Consequently, he was in a manner prepared for the announcement. Besides, although an utter coward when any physical danger was close upon him, so long as there was time for cunning to serve him, his foxy craft had resources enough for the occasion.

He utterly astonished Jeanie, and perplexed the lawyer, by producing his snuff-box, taking a refreshing pinch, and sighing with all the resignation of a martyr who feels that his long-

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suffering spirit has been driven to extremity, and that it must now assert itself in the cause of truth.

"Od, it's extraordinar'!" he exclaimed meekly, gently raising his hands and dabbing his head, "that the most innocent and kindly-meant actions o' ane's life may be turned against him like whips to scourge him. Mistress Gray, I wonder at ye, and I'm sorry for ye too. Will ye please to step down the stair to my room, and I'll gie ye a' the explanations that are in my power? I dinna like to stand here disgracing the presence o' the dead wi' our unseemly squabbles. Will ye kindly respect my scruples on this point and oblige me?"

As is usual when one is excessively angry, humble politeness on the part of the person who has roused our anger acts on the system much like a dip in cold water. Although his submission only intensified her loathing for the creature, she was unable to offer any opposition to his moderate and polite request. She simply followed Mr. Carnegie, who immediately complied with the Laird's wish.

As soon as they had entered the chamber below, the Laird closed the door, placed a chair for Jeanie, and observing that she looked fatigued asked in his mildest tone if she would allow him to offer her some slight refreshment. She was for the moment dazed by his marvellous placidity, and the respect with which he treated her, notwithstanding the grave imputations she had brought against him, and she could not have answered him even had she been disposed to do so. Neither would she sit down.

He did not press her; but after giving Mr. Carnegie a chair, he produced bottle and glasses from his cupboard, and asked him to partake. The lawyer, from being puzzled, began to feel a little awkward under the circumstances, and accepted the hospitality. Never in all his experience had he seen or heard of a guilty person conducting himself with such equanimity and friendliness toward his accusers.

"Now, Mrs. Gray," said the Laird meekly, with another pinch and another dab, and seating himself, so that he should face both his hearers, "it shall not be my fault if I dinna gie

ye satisfaction in respect o' everything ye suspect. Your suspicion canna harm me. I hope I hae spiritual strength enough to bear far mair if necessary for the sins o' the flesh I hae committed. But I'm wae to think o' what a dreadful state o' mind ye must be in before ye could hae gien sic suspicions breath. I'm sure it would be the height o' pleasure to me if I could relieve ye in ony way. Aiblins it will help ye a wee thing if I clear up everything sae far as I can in a prompt and plain manner."

He paused, as if expecting her to commend his frankness; but she did not move or speak. She only continued to look straight in his face, wonderingly.

"That's all we require, sir," said Mr. Carnegie, feeling that some reply was demanded; "and all that is necessary."

The Laird took a complacent pinch, and proceeded.

"Weel, I'll say naething about the very great boldness o' stepping into a man's house—especially when that man was ay ken'd as ane wha feared the Lord and walked upright—and making sic wild charges against him, wi' very little proof to back them, as it seems to me. I'll say naething about that, although the very serious nature o' the charges will compel me to insist on the fullest investigation o' my conduct, if ye persist in them after my explanation. Should that investigation be onyway to the detriment o' your guidman's cause—as I doubt it will be—I take Mr. Carnegie to witness that a' the blame is your ain."

He paused again, and still she did not speak.

"Mrs. Gray has no doubt said more than she meant," explained the lawyer, fidgeting, and beginning to think that he had been somewhat hasty in falling in with her suspicions, to the grave injury of his professional reputation and business; "she was excited, sir, as you could not help observing, by the vexations words of Girzie Todd."

"Oh, I make a' needful excuses, dinna fear that, Mr. Carnegie; and I declare to ye there's nae anger in my heart against Mistress Gray, for I ken the troubled state o' her mind, and as I hae told ye, I'm sorry for her."

"I dinna need your pity," she said, in a low unsteady voice.  
"I want to hear your explanation."

"Ye'll no hae to wait lang for that, then, Mistress Gray. We'll begin at the beginning, and regarding what ye hae said about the *Colin*, I cannot understand you. But on that score ye couldna hae a better adviser than Mr. Carnegie, for the brig was assured through him, and it's both his business and his interest to make sure that there was naething wrang in the way the vessel was lost. I will insist upon him going over the evidence as to her loss again, and although I was only a part holder in her, I pledge mysel' to make guid every penny o' the insurance money, wi' due interest, if there has been the least unfair dealing."

"Ye may be ca'ed on to answer for't wi' something mair nor your siller," she said, beginning to beat the floor with her foot.

"We'll soon ken that, for I'll place the matter in the hands o' the fiscal my sel' this very day. Now, respecting last night: it's quite true I quitted the house at a late hour, but no to my knowledge wi' ony difference in my manner frae my usual way of going out when necessary, and coming back when I like. No being a married man, there's naebody to question my incoming or outgoing."

"Ye looked unco like as if ye were feared o' onybody kenning o' your outgoing."

The Laird only smiled benignantly, and blinked upon her, tapping his snuff-box the while.

"Ye were watching me, and ye wouldna hae been watching me if ye had no suspected that I had done something wrang. Your ain suspicion would gie my manner a' the peculiarity ye attach to it. Very weel, I'll no stop to argue wi' ye; I'll just tell ye what I was doing and why I was doing it, and I may just say at the same time that I hae proof enough to satisfy ony unprejudiced person o' the truth o' what I say."

"I judge ye by what I saw and heard."

"And judge me wrang, as ye'll admit some day. I gaed to the Links and met Carrach, as ye hae said—and if ye please,

ye'll mind how easy it would be for me to deny a' this, seeing that it's only your word against mine, and yours is the word o' an interested person. But I frankly own to everything ye hae said, barring the conclusions ye hae drawn, of course."

"Oh, aye, that *looks* honest," she said bitterly.

"Od, it's extraordinar'," exclaimed the Laird, taking another pinch, and looking appealingly to the lawyer, "how suspicion will distort the plainest facts. However, I feel it's my duty to try and satisfy ye, although the sinful pride o' man tempts me to bid ye gae your way, and no to say another word to ye. But I'll no do that. I hae admitted that I met Carrach on the Links—"

"And gied him a hunder gowd pieces?"

"Surely, seeing that I drew them frae the bank for him yesterday. Now, I'll tell ye why. Ye mind, Mr. Carnegie, speirin' yesterday, when ye met me at the door o' the bank, where Carrach was, and when I expected to see him?"

"Perfectly, and you said you thought he was at Ayr, and that you expected him at Portlappoch to-day, although you could not be sure of it."

"Just that. Weel, when I got hame here yesterday afternoon there was a message waiting me frae Carrach, to say that he couldna clear out o' Ayr till the evening, that about twal o'clock he would be opposite the Links, and if I would bring the siller there, and signal to him, he would come ashore and take it frae me and gie me a receipt, as he wanted to save the time that it would cost him to put into the Port. I didna see anything wrang in him wanting to save time, and sae I agreed to meet him as he appointed. That was how it happened to be at night. Is that clear, Mr. Carnegie?"

"Quite clear, so far."

"Now then, ye want to ken why I should hae to gie him sic a heap o' siller. In a word then—because it was his ain. Although he's an awful man for whisky, skipper Carrach has saved siller in my employ, for besides giein' him guid wages, I favoured him on account o' his sister, G—



Carrach as is her right name, though she changed it to Todd when her wean was born, to gar folk imagine that she had been a wedded woman. As she would never explain anything about it to anybody, folk were just left to think what they like, and in course o' time her ain name came to be forgotten, especially as she had been little ken'd at the Port afore she left my house to bide there."

As if overcome by the memory of that event, he paused, wiped his nose hurriedly, and then deliberately laying the handkerchief across his knees to be ready for future use, he proceeded—

"But I minded ; my repentance has been ower lang and sair to allow me to forget, Lord kens. I needna fash you wi' that, however. I just mention it to let you understand how it was I favoured Carrach sae muckle : it was for his sister's sake. He made siller, and I had it in keeping for him. He wanted to make mair, and as the worship o' Mammon tempts men who are no guided by Christian principle into wicked acts, it tempted him to the slave-trade, which he's been hankering after for the last twalmonth. My principles wouldna allow me to join him in such an inhuman traffic, and at last he resolved to enter it himself. So he bought the schooner *Ailsa*, for which I paid on his account, and he demanded the balance o' his siller. The balance amounted to a hunder pounds, and of course I agreed at once to pay him his due. But I was angry wi' him for breaking wi' me, and told him if he ever came back I would expose the nefarious trade he had been engaged in."

"Quite right too," muttered Mr. Carnegie.

"Maybe I did say that I would gie him ower to the hangman ; but that was just a strong way o' expressing my indignation. Now ye ken why I met him on the Links last night and why I gied him the siller. Is it plain to ye, and is there anything else ye want to learn ?"

All this appeared to be so straightforward, so much of it agreed with what Carrach himself told her, and with what she had heard Girzie say, that Jeanie, in spite of herself, felt her

supporting hope tottering under her. And yet she did not doubt the truth of her convictions! The woman's faith in her husband still rose above all reason. The man might tremble at his own doubts of her; but her trust in him transcended, defied, all proof and argument.

"Where is the paper ye were sae anxious to get him to sign before a witness?" she said with teeth set.

The Laird wheeled round and laid his hand upon the desk as if about to produce the document on the spot; but, changing his mind, he faced her again.

"No, I will not show it to ye," he said stiffly; "it would do nae good if your suspicion o' me is so strong as that comes to. But I will place it in the hands o' the fiscal the-day, and and he'll let ye see it. Meanwhile, I may tell ye that it can gie ye sma' gratification, for it's nothing more than a receipt in full o' a' claims against me and mine. Is there anything else?"

He partly closed his eyes and folded his hands on his handkerchief, waited in complacent resignation to hear what might be the next objection.

"If everything was sae fair between ye, why did ye allow him to force me awa' wi' him?"

"I beg ye to remember, Mistress Gray, that I protested against ony violence toward ye; and you must be aware that for me to hae attempted to fight wi' him for ye, would hae been just to hae got mysel' hurt without helping you. But to tell the truth, ye didna seem to me to be so dreadful anxious to win awa' from him as ye make out now."

That was the first thing he had said—insinuating and gross as it was—which gave her hope that she might yet prove how utterly false was his apparently plausible explanation.

"Ye saw me strive wi' him, ye heard me cry for help, and yet ye haena even made ony attempt to acquaint my friends wi' what had befallen me."

That touched him; but only to the extent of causing him to open his eyes quickly.

"It was a neglect, I admit," he responded,

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"but no intentional. The first thing I meant to do this morning was to see your faither; but I hadn'a got half through wi' my breakfast when Girzie came here like a rampant idiot and drove everything clean out o' my head till ye came yoursel'. Is there onything else?"

He kept so near the line of truth that it was difficult to mark at what points he diverged.

"Mr. Carnegie," she said quietly, "would you leave me a minute wi' the Laird?"

The lawyer looked at her doubtfully; but something in the calm face, suggestive of a purpose and of strength, decided him. He rose immediately and quitted the room, almost stumbling over Mrs. Begg, who had been standing with her ear at the door.

The Laird's eyes blinked with some curiosity as he waited for the issue of this unexpected arrangement.

She stepped close up to him, looking fixedly in his face; and she spoke in a low firm voice.

"What ye hae said looks sae like the truth that it may cheat other folk, and will, nae doubt; but it canna cheat me."

"Really, Mistress Gray, I dinna see your meaning."

His voice had something of the harshness in it Robin had noticed on the occasion of his last visit, when the Laird had been speaking to Mrs. Begg.

"I mean this: that the *Colin* was burnt by your orders; that Carrach is a murderer, if no by your orders at least through your schemes, and ye seek to shield him now at the cost o' an innocent man's life, to save yoursel' frae the harm his confession would do ye."

"You're a bauld woman, Mistress Gray"—(affecting indignation, but his thin lips trembling nevertheless).

"Ye shall find me sae, for day and night I'll follow ye frae this hour out until God pleases to do my man justice, in the eyes o' the world, whether he be dead or living."

"I'll take care to let the fiscal ken what ye say. Daft folk are no just left free to annoy decent and peaceable subjects as they may take it in their heads."

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"Ye stand your ground weel, sir, but I'll gie ye ae chance yet. I ken it wasna your hand that struck the blow—ye couldna do that. Ye would torture a puir wretch wi' lees and shame, and ye would look on and smile, and maybe say a prayer ower his dead throes. But ye wouldna up wi' your hand to end his pain at ance. That would be ower muckle risk. But the guilt is on your shouthers for a' that, mair than on the shouthers o' a rough-witted chiel' like Carrach. If ye save yoursel' that's a' you care for. Weel, gie me the means o' saving my guidman, and I promise ye that I'll do naething till ye hae had time to win safe awa' frae the place."

A pause, a strange breathless stillness in the room, and then he said deliberately—

"As I'm no guilty, Mistress Gray, I hae nae need to bargain wi' ye for my life."

She turned away disheartened, but not beaten.

He followed her to the door, and, with a sigh and a considerate dab of his head in her direction, as if recommending her to the care of her friends, he took leave of Mr. Carnegie.

"Ye'll tell the fiscal, should ye happen to meet him, that I want to see him particularly the-day," he said; "there maun be the fullest investigation into this business. I canna allow the aspersions Mistress Gray has cast on my character to go unnoticed, though they are ridiculous enough almost to confound themsel's. And by the by, as ye canna act for me in this matter, seeing that ye're on her side, would ye recommend me some trustworthy writer frae Ayr to look after my interests?"

The lawyer promised, and stepping into the gig, in which Jeanie was already seated, he drove away. He was dissatisfied, and looked steadily at the road before them, not speaking a word until they were within sight of the Port.

"I'm afraid you hae allowed your suspicions against the Laird to carry ye a wee thing ower far," he remarked, touching the horse with his whip unnecessarily. "I own there was suspicion, or I would not have been here the day; but there was no proof; and it's my opinion the way he

represents the affair puts proof farther away from us than ever, although there's no saying what may turn up against Carrach."

She was a degree more disheartened by this, for it sounded to her somewhat like an intimation that he proposed forsaking her cause. But she only answered quietly—

"We'll see."

Mr. Carnegie was a worthy man; but he was threatened with the loss of an important client, and the Laird had been very plausible. He could not help doubting whether he had followed the wisest course for his own interests, notwithstanding his sincere desire to help Mrs. Gray.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

### A SACRIFICE.

"Content am I, if Heaven shall give  
But happiness to thee—  
And as wi' thee I'd wish to live,  
For thee I'd bear to dee."—*Burns*.

HUTCHESON was lounging at the lawyer's door when the gig drove up.

"You're soon back," ejaculated Mr. Carnegie.

"Hae ye seen him?" cried Jeanie, reaching eagerly toward the man.

"I got word o' him sooner nor I expected, and that's how I'm so soon back."

"Hae ye seen him?" she repeated.

"Aye, mistress, I hae, and I'm looking for him here every minute."

"Where is he?"

"That I dinna ken. He just tauld me to say he would be here as soon as he could get through wi' what he had to do."

"Are ye sure he'll come?"

"What would he no come for? The minute I acquainted him that it was you wha had sent for him, he bade me come back here and wait for him."

Mr. Carnegie took Jeanie into the little parlour where they had breakfasted, and left her there, whilst he disposed of various matters of business in his office. He promised that the moment Falcon arrived she should see him.

She had not very long to wait; but her feverish impatience made the minutes drag slowly. She had parted with him only a few days ago, bitterly praying that they might never meet again; and here she was burning with desire for his appearance. What an age of suffering she had passed through during those five days, and how far that night on which they had parted seemed to have receded! Measured by the anguish she had endured, those days were years. The period of happiness slips by, leaving only a faint trace behind in pleasant memories: but misery cuts deep tracks in our hearts marking its slow and tortuous passage.

At length there were footsteps in the lobby. Mr. Carnegie's voice sounded with unusual distinctness, the door was opened, and a man entered.

Grainger!—and yet not Grainger, but Jeames Falcon!

The only difference she could distinguish between the two was that this man's face was bare, and Grainger's had been half covered by a bushy beard. Everything else, the figure, the blue flannel shirt, the hat with its broad brim which had been always drawn so far over his brow, that together with what had seemed his sulky habit of sinking his chin on his breast, had prevented her forming any idea of the character of his features—all appeared to be the same as Grainger's. And yet the uncovered head and face she saw now were certainly Falcon's.

She had started up on his entrance, but she remained silent staring at him in wonder. Was it possible that she had been several hours in his presence and yet had failed to recognize him? She could not understand that. But it was not so wonderful after all. She had been really very little near the man on board the schooner; he had spoken to her only in the briefest and gruffest manner; she had been all the time excited, with her mind fixed intently on one object—escape;

and, most important, she had been under the impression that Falcon was dead. Under the circumstances, it was little marvel that she had failed to identify him.

He had halted near the door, and stood as if expecting her to speak; but, finding her dumb, he broke the silence himself.

"You sent for me, and I hae come, Mistress Gray, as I said I would, only when you yoursel' prayed me to come to you."

His voice was low and sad, but quite steady. It was the first time he had addressed her by her married name, and it sounded oddly in her ears. But it intimated with what resolute will he had set himself to recognize the barrier which had risen between them. How much he had suffered before he had taught himself to pronounce that name calmly she could guess from the slight hesitation of his tongue at the word, but a stranger would scarcely have noticed it.

That form of address reminded her of the serious work before her and stirred her to action.

"I sent for ye, Jeames Falcon," she answered, and there was tenderness as well as firmness in her tone, "to ask ye to help me to save my guidman frae a death o' shame."

He made no response; his lips were closed tightly, and a faint spasm twitched his features.

She approached him, trembling with eager hope and fear, watching his face intently.

"Ye winna refuse me that, Jeamie?" she pleaded softly. "Ye winna refuse to satisfy Robin how muckle he has wranged baith you and me in his thoughts, by proving yoursel' his best friend in the hour o' his sair need?"

His head sunk further on his breast, and yet he made no reply.

"For my sake, Jeamie; for the sake o' a' I hae tholed on your account, and you on mine, dinna refuse me this last service."

He almost broke down at that, and he shaded his eyes with his hand whilst he spoke huskily—

"Me save him!—that's a hard job ye ask me to undertake,

harder than ye seem to think. But a' your pity is for him : ye hae nane to spare for me, although I hae lost everything, and he has won what I hae lost. It's against nature for me to try to restore him to the happiness that his life bars me frae for ever—the happiness that I think him unworthy o', after the scorn he cast on you."

"Ah ! whist, Jearmie, dinna speak that way. He was deceived by fause tongues and blinded wi' his passion. Dinna think o' that—only think that it's an innocent man in peril o' his life, and help me to save him. I ken that it's hard for you to help him, and my heart is as sair for ye as it is for him. I wouldna ask ye to do this, but that there's nae other body wha can help me as ye could if ye would."

"I did not mean to speak that way," he said with an effort controlling his emotion. "I came to learn what ye sought wi' me, and to do your bidding if I could. You hae asked more than I thought I could ever do even for you, and that made me forget mysel'. But it's the last time you shall ever hear word frae me about what's gane and by. The lassie wha filled life wi' hope and light to me is dead ; but for her sake, for the sake o' the sweet memory she has left me, I will do what I can for you, even to helping Robin Gray in his need."

His voice was low and tremulous with emotion—pitifully sad to hear—in spite of the huge struggle of the brave fellow to render it calm and steady.

She bowed her head, her tears fell fast, and she could not speak for a while. She dried her eyes at length, and looked up.

"Thank ye, Mister Falcon."

And with that word, the last link which connected the man and woman who stood together in this room with the youth and maiden who had plighted troth at the door of the fisherman's cot—such a long weary time ago it seemed—was snapped. It cost them an acute pang, as if some vital chord of the heart or brain had broken. He started as if a pistol had exploded beside his ear when she called him Mr. Falcon.

The separation was complete ; the past was really dead, and they were calm and bold, abler to carry forward the work

which duty demanded of them. Tears, regrets, and vain thoughts of what might have been, were all thrust from them from that hour. What tears they might shed in secret, what hidden regrets they might entertain, were those which are given to some loved one who now lies cold and silent in the grave. That was what they became sensible of when Jeanie said, "Thank ye, Mister Falcon."

"Will ye come into my office now?" said Mr. Carnegie, appearing at the door; "there is nobody likely to interrupt us, and I want to make a note of whatever information you can give us."

Jeanie and Falcon followed him into the office. She sat down, he stood beside the desk, at which the lawyer seated himself pen in hand. Hutcheson sat on the corner of a little table by the window.

"The first thing we want to know then," proceeded Mr. Carnegie, "is how the poor lad Wattie Todd—for I suppose there can be no doubt that it's him?"

"There can be no doubt from what I have heard," answered Falcon.

"Just that. Well, the first thing we want to know is how he came to have on the clothes you had been seen wearing only two or three days previous?"

"On the Monday the Laird sent up a message for me to meet him at the second mile-stone on the Ayr road. It was early in the morning, but I started at once, and was at the place nearly an hour before he joined me. He came in his gig. He told me that he was going to Ayr, and from something he had learned believed that he would see Carrach there. I was waiting at Askaig only for Carrach in order to learn what ship Hutcheson had sailed in from Liverpool. The Laird was to ask him, and he objected to me applying to you, sir, at once, on the score that if Carrach got the least hint of what I was wanting he would turn upon me and charge me with setting fire to the *Colin*. I did not fear that, but thought it better not to give him a chance of escaping me, and so agreed to the Laird's plan."

The lawyer ceased writing, frowned, bit the end of his quill, and looked dissatisfied.

"I went with him at once to Ayr. We remained in the town all day, the Laird leaving me for a couple of hours to make inquiries about Carrach, whilst he transacted some business with M'Laren & Sons, High Street. The business I have since learned was the purchase of the schooner *Ailsa*. I went to the inn where I had stopped on the day I landed from the south, and got a bundle containing a suit of clothes which I had left there in order to be able to walk the quicker home here. I didna then ken what was waiting for me, or I wouldna hae been in such haste to come back."

"Did you hear of Carrach?"

"No, I did not hear anything of him, and the Laird said we must wait a few days longer. I now believe that he had no expectation of seeing him there, and that he had taken me away from Askaig merely to prevent me meeting Cairnieford, who called during my absence."

Again Mr. Carnegie bit the end of his pen, and this time uttered a short "umph."

"The next morning—that was Tuesday morning you'll mind—I put on the clothes I had brought with me from Ayr and threw those I had been wearing aside. About ten o'clock Wattie Todd came up to me, poor lad. He had taken a great fancy for me, and I liked him. He was with me every day, and was my only comrade during the week I stayed at Askaig. Bob Keith was so talkative that in the state of my mind at the time I could not endure him.

"Wattie and I went out as usual to the hills. We didna heed though it was raining, at least I didna heed, and Wattie made no complaint. He liked to be thought manly and fit for yonthing that onybody else was fit for. We went down by the burn and noticed that it was rising fast. I was going to pass under the Brownie's Bite when Wattie stopped me.

"'Dinna gang that gate, Jeamie,' he said, and I noticed then that he was shivering as if very cold.

"'Why no, Wattie?' I speired.

"It's no lucky to cross the Brownie's teeth, ye ken, or he'd be sure to swallow aye o' us afore lang. Eh, man! what a big mou' he maun hae! He'd swallow the house if it was to tum'le ower. Come awa', let's gang up again.'

"It was the first time that he had refused to follow me anywhere; indeed, he had always been so reckless in following me across the most dangerous passes that he had several times alarmed me, and rendered me more careful of the routes I chose for our wanderings. I went back with him to the house. He was still shivering. He was always cold like, poor lad, but seemed more so than usual on this day. I discovered that he was wet to the skin, and told him to take the clothes I had cast off and put them on. I was wet enough myself; but I did not care for that. I was indifferent to every discomfort.

"He was not quite willing to put on the clothes, but I got them for him and forced him to put them on—Lord forgive me, for I think that was the cause of his death. He took his clothes over to the barn and hung them up to dry. I went with him, and we lay down amongst some hay, covering ourselves for warmth. We talked. I could always talk with him, for he told me of all that had happened at the Port whilst I had been away. I fancied that the more I heard of it the more indifferent I would grow towards the place and all its miserable associations. In return he would have me tell him about ships and guns and fights, and that pleased me too; for whilst I spoke I fancied that the thought of action would draw me into it again, and thus enable me to forget so much that I wished to forget.

"After dinner we went back to the barn. The rain was falling heavier every minute, the wind was rising, and we could hear the spate gathering force. Wattie was frightened when the thunder and lightning commenced, and at last we went into the house. I found Mistress Gray there."

He paused; he felt that he could not tell how angrily she had blamed him for enticing her there with a false message. She relieved him.

"And I accused ye o' trying to raise dispeace atween me and my guidman," she said quietly. "I ken how wrang I was; I owned to ye before ye left me that night that I ken'd I was wrang. A' that passed frae that time to the time ye quitted the house Mr. Carnegie has heard. But ye had better tell it too that it may be written to satisfy Robin o' the truth o' what he was told."

Falcon briefly narrated what had passed, exactly as Jeanie had already done.

"From the moment I ran out of the house," he concluded, "I never saw Wattie Todd again. I heard him calling something after me, but the storm was too loud and my own excitement too great to let me hear what he said. The next morning I discovered that in my haste I had snatched up his bonnet instead of my own."

"Thank you, that's perfectly clear how he came to have on your clothes, and as he was much about your size, and as his features were unrecognizable, that explains how his body was mistaken for yours," commented the lawyer.

"And now tell us," said Jeanie, "how ye came to be on board the *Ailsa* and calling yoursel' Grainger."

"Eh!" exclaimed Mr. Carnegie, "hae we found Grainger as well as Falcon?"

"Aye, it's even sae, or my e'en hae deceived me greatly."

"It is so," said Falcon, "and Hutcheson can corroborate what I say to the moment when I went on board the schooner. When I left Askaig I made straight for the Ayr road, never heeding the dangers o' the darkness and the storm. Besides, I was in a state which made danger welcome. But I got safe to Ayr a while before any of the inns were open. I had to wander about for several hours before there was anybody stirring to give me the information I wanted. At last I learned that a boat had sailed the day before, and there would not be another until the end of the week."

"I thought of starting by the coach, but it would not leave until next day, and then, so eager was I by any means in my power to put distance between me and Portlappoch, that

wearied as I was I proposed to start on foot that afternoon for Carlisle. I was down at the quay when that resolution occurred to me, and I was just moving away when I met Hutcheson."

"That's right," commented Hutcheson, nodding to add strength to his confirmation, and swinging his legs for the same purpose no doubt; "and pleased and astonished I was to see ye, when I had been thinking for a towmond past that ye was at the bottom o' the sea taking your dram wi' our friend Davy."

"We went up to the inn together, and whilst we drank, we of course spoke of the *Colin* and how his statement had been obtained from him."

"Oh, there was nae particular wark about it. Carrach just tauld me that he didna want to hae ony mair ado wi' me, and I needna waste time travelling back wi' him. I ken'd that my word would be nae weight against a' the others, and as a guid berth was offered me through Carrach on board the *Royal George* I just took it, and signed the paper he'd got drawn up by a snivelling lawyer body—nae offence to ye, Mr. Carnegie, he wasna like ye in ony respect."

"Thank you. What you say now is exactly the same as you told me this morning."

"Then you know about that," resumed Falcon; "and I need not give you the explanations which passed between us in detail. But when I told him that I had been waiting for Carrach, he informed me that he had seen Donald, who had been one of the *Colin's* men—the special friend of the skipper—and who had been unaccountably spiteful towards me. Hutcheson had spoken to him, and learned that he was then waiting for Carrach, who was to take command of the *Ailsa*, which had just been bought by the Laird.

"Till that moment I had been so eager to get away from the country that I had resigned all thought of punishing Carrach for his crime, and the many sorrows it had brought upon me and others. But fancy or hate put it into my head that Providence had placed the means of bringing this man to

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justice in my hands. I asked Hutcheson to help me, and he was ready with all his heart when I told him something of the mishaps which had befallen me through Carrach's villany. We waited for Carrach.

"Yesterday morning we saw him with Donald at the harbour change-house. I got near enough to hear what they were saying. Carrach was telling Donald that they were to lie off the Links, and the Laird was to signal to them that night. As the business was particular and private, he did not want to have more men on board than they could help. I had not suspected the Laird of being this man's accomplice until that moment. The suspicion once roused I remembered many incidents which had appeared to me singular when they occurred, but which were quite plain now. The Laird had been fooling me all the time, and was really trying to help Carrach to escape me, instead of helping me to lay hands on him.

"I determined to discover if possible to what extent the Laird was involved. I borrowed this suit of clothes from Hutcheson, and got my face covered with a beard by the barber at the Cross, on the pretence that I wanted to surprise my friends who had not seen me for some time. I soon found Donald seeking hands; but hands were short for a long voyage, and I was the only man he could get who was ready to start that night. But he got three other men who agreed to ship next day.

"That was all I wanted, for the schooner required to lie off the harbour next day to ship her crew, and by that time I would have learned all I wanted to know. I gave Hutcheson the instructions which he has carried out, and I went on board the *Ailsa*. Neither Carrach nor Donald had the least suspicion of my real character. I affected to be surly, in order to keep them from speaking to me more than was necessary, lest in answering my voice should betray me. We anchored off the Links, and Carrach made me turn in and take a rest for a couple of hours, so that I might be fresh to relieve Donald.

"I suppose this was chiefly to prevent me seeing anything

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that might be done. I went below; but immediately crept up again and remained on the watch. Carrach and Donald lowered one of the boats; and about an hour afterwards—in the midst of the skipper's impatient grumblings, which enabled me to understand that this meeting with the Laird was of much importance—a light signalled from the shore. He answered it, and then put off in the small boat.

"When he came back, bringing Mistress Gray with him, I was alarmed for her sake and for my own; for my own, for I feared that she would detect my disguise, and in her surprise betray me. I went on deck just after they arrived. From some words I heard Carrach say to her I knew that she had been brought there by force; but I was puzzled by her quiet conduct. I grumbled loudly to the skipper, in order to give her some courage by showing her that one of the men on board was not entirely under his control."

"And it did that," broke in Jeanie gratefully.

"And also with the purpose of preparing her for the sound of my voice, so that it would either deceive her as I wished, or prevent her from showing too much surprise in the event of recognition. I wished to deceive her, because I had promised her that she would never see me again until she herself prayed me to come to her. I did not know then the sad reason she had for never expecting to see me again in this world, whether she wished it or not. When you" (turning to her) "spoke to me at the helm I understood your purpose in keeping so quiet and I saw your distress at discovering that the boat had gone adrift. You thought me callous and unwilling to help ye, but it was because—weel, no matter; I am no to speak about that."

He paused. She looked him steadily in the face; and somehow the quiet trust in him which her eyes expressed gave him courage. He went on:—

"My purpose on board the *Ailsa* changed from the minute you set foot on deck. I had come there to find proof of the Laird's complicity with the Highlander. I was there then only to save you. I would have felled the man if he had

touched you against your will, and I nearly did it once, as you'll mind ; but I checked myself in time. It was an unfair advantage I was taking, and besides I wanted to deliver him as sound as possible to the hangman. You know how I fastened Donald in the forecastle and Carrach in the hold. The only thing that I have to explain now is why I left you so long locked up in the cabin. There was no other reason than that I was determined not to let you recognize me if I could help it. For the same reason I left you as soon as we landed."

"And as he ken'd that I was to be here the-day," added Hutcheson, "he was on the look-out for me, and that's how I got word o' him sooner than I expected."

Jeanie rose.

"Has the opinion ye expressed to me on the road, Mr. Carnegie, been changed wi' ony thing ye hae heard ?" she asked.

Mr. Carnegie scratched his ear and bit the end of his pen, coughing as he spoke.

"Opinions are no the thing, Mrs. Gray ; it's facts we want. There's plenty in what has been said to form opinions on the subject; but so far as I can see there is not a grain of positive proof yet to connect the Laird with either of the crimes, and the one seems dependent on the other. There's the gold to be sure, but his explanation about that looks quite sound and natural."

She turned quietly to Falcon, drawing her plaid around her.

"Our work begins now," she said; "and while ye hae been speaking a notion has come to me o' where it should begin."

"Where ?"

"Wi' finding the man wha brought the gig for me to gang to Askaig."

"The fiscal and myself have been trying to find him for the last two days and have failed," observed Mr. Carnegie, positive and somewhat nettled by her cool way of taking the matter out of his hands.

"But I think we may find him now."

"Aye, have ye minded who he was?"

"No, but I hae a suspicion o' wha he was."

"Whom do you suspect?"

She looked at Hutcheson.

"Was it no on Wednesday morning that you first met Donald at Ayr?"

"Aye, Wednesday morning."

"Ye're sure o' that?"

"I'll take my davy on't ony minute, for I only landed mysel' on the Tuesday, and it was the next morning I met him."

"Then I think it might hae been him," she said, glancing at the lawyer; "sae we'll gang to the lock-up, Mr. Falcon, and ye can question him about it."

"I ken something o' the chiel', sae I'll gae wi' ye," said Hutcheson.

"Mind what ye say to him," warningly ejaculated Mr. Carnegie: "you'll find me here when you're done."

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### TRACES.

"My hearth is grawing cauld,  
And will be caulder still;  
And sair, sair in the fauld  
Will be the winter's chill."—*Thomas Smibert.*

THE lock-up of the Port comprised the ground floor of a two-storey house in the middle of the main street. The upper flat, to which access was obtained by a straight stone staircase built outside the wall, was occupied by the constable and his family. The entrance to the lower flat was by a dirty-looking door beneath the landing of the stair.

The interior of this primitive kind of prison was very simply arranged. There were whitewashed stone walls, a stone floor with several ruts where the stone had been worn or chipped out; a form, a stool, and a high desk, all of unpainted wood, but browned with age and service and marked with cracks and

notches. At the high desk Geordie Armstrong penned his despatches, on which, in his estimation, the safety of the country depended, and at the same time kept his eyes on the two narrow doors of what were called the cells.

The doors were made of stout oak, and had withstood unshaken the furious batterings of many a drunken clown who had been locked up to bring him to his senses. The cells were really cells in point of size. They were not more than six feet by five inside, and scarcely permitted a tall man to stretch himself on the floor. They contained no furniture beyond a bundle of straw thrown on the floor for the prisoner to rest on if he chose. They were lighted only by a slit cut in each of the doors, which served also to enable the constable to overlook the conduct of the temporary occupants.

As Falcon and Jeanie, accompanied by the sometime mate of the *Colin*, entered the lock-up, the door being open, they heard Geordie Armstrong's authoritative voice raised.

"I wish ye would let me finish my report, woman; I tell ye I canna let ye inside the cell wi' him, and if he winna answer ye through the door whatever ye want to speir ye maun just wait for the fiscal. The chiel' wha gied them in charge told me no to let onybody, no even the Laird o' Clashgirn himsel', in aside them."

"When will the fiscal be here? I hae waited hours and he hasna come yet."

"Weel, he's later nor he said he would be, but we servants o' justice canna just control our ain time. He'll be here sune, nae doubt."

The woman turned round a wild haggard face, which even Jeanie had much difficulty in recognizing as that of Girzie Todd. She had come straight from Clashgirn to the lock-up, and although Armstrong had persistently refused to admit her to Carrach's cell, he had permitted her to talk to him as much as she pleased through the wicket of the door.

She had been trying all this time to obtain from her brother some hint of the truth or falsehood of the charge laid against him. She told him who had been the victim, and that she

believed another person guilty of the crime. But he had remained doggedly silent, only bidding her once or twice to "go away and mind her own business."

She believed that if she could get in beside him he would tell her what she wished to know, but Geordie would not open the door.

"Oh, ye're come," she cried bitterly, "and ye as weel, Jeamie Falcon, it's braw times ye hae gien us and my laddie to die for ye. Maybe this thrax dog will open the doors for ye, though he winna for me that hae the best right to ken the truth. Try him."

"Let her in," said Falcon, accompanying the order with such a significant nod that Geordie discovered something he had not thought of before, and instantly produced the key.

"Ye'll take the responsibility yourself," he paused to say.

"Certainly."

"That's enough. Come awa', Girzie, and ye'll see the inside o't; ye're the first that was anxious for the sight in my time."

She passed rapidly into the dark little chamber. The door closed; Falcon and Jeanie stepped up to it, and the constable remained beside them stiffly erect, but, like them, listening.

They heard her speaking in low hurried accents, conjuring him by every tie of kindred, by service she had rendered him, by everything he feared or hoped, to tell her so far as he knew how her bairn had met his death.

She was kneeling down, for he had seated himself on his bundle of straw with his back against the wall, and had made no movement of any kind at her entrance. The agonized entreaty of the mother appeared to have no more effect on his obdurate nature now that she was kneeling beside him than when she had been at the other side of the door.

She pleaded with all the terrible eloquence her great sorrow inspired, but with no avail. She swore to observe his confidence inviolable, swore to bring the true assassin to the gallows, even if he should be the dead bairn's own father, and at last she obtained this answer from him in his usual stolid hoarse tone—

" You said that Falcon was no dead ? Then you'll no thocht that I would slew your poy ? No—pe-tam."

She tried again, but all her efforts only obtained this second speech from him.

" Could you'll no save your breath and get us some ouskie, for it is tam dry in this hole ? "

She knocked at the door to be let out. She could make nothing of him, and she saw at length it was useless trying to make him speak. Neither prayers nor threats moved him in the least. She came forth with bent shoulders and head bowed, weak and aged as if years had passed over her in the last half-hour. She moved slowly, almost tottered, to the door, and was going out when Falcon touched her arm.

" Girzie."

She turned her head as if with difficulty, and her sunken eyes rested on his face: they were utterly devoid of expression.

" Wattie was the only friend I had when I was in sair trouble," he said, neither voice nor eyes clear or steady. " God kens how gladly I would change places wi' him the day if I could. Next to yoursel' I think he liked me best, and ye canna ken how bitterly I feel your loss, thinking that I am in some way partly to blame for't. Dinna blame me ower muckle in thinking o' him."

She looked at him a long while before speaking, as if his words reached her from a distance; and then, feebly—

" I'm no doitered, Jeamie, though I'm broken doon sair by this, and I blame naebody but them wha thocht the foul thocht, and struck the foul blow that robbed me o' my bairn."

" They shall pay for't, dinna doubt that—they shall pay for't."

As if she had been touched by an electric current, her form rose erect and firm to its ordinary stature; but it was only for a second and she sank again.

" Aye, but there's the sting o't," she moaned; " on the ae hand is my brither, on the other hand his faither. Oh, the curse has followed him frae his birth, and the sins o' his parents hae been visited on him, and on them through him."

"I'll go down to the house wi ye," he said, not understanding her allusions perfectly; "ye'll be better after a rest."

"Aye, maybe sae, maybe sae, and aiblins it was better that it should be as it is, for he was a puir weak half-witted creature, that a' the world scorned and laughed at, and he would hae a miserable time after I was gane. But oh, if I ken'd—if I ken'd"—(her teeth clenched, and passion stirring within her again)—"I would hae justice if I ken'd the truth—I would hae justice."

Her pace quickened as her wrath flashed into renewed life.

"Ye shall ken the truth before many hours pass," he said as they stopped at her door.

"Gie me hope o' that—gie me hope o' that," she said eagerly, her eyes glistening.

"I will give you certainty of it, but I cannot wait to explain now."

"Come ben, come ben a minute, I want ye to do something for Wattie."

He obeyed that summons at once, eager as he was to return to the lock-up.

"He sha'na be buried at the expense o' Nicol McWhapple," she went on, in a proud hard voice. "I'll gie ye siller—his siller that I saved for him, and ye can arrange about a grave for him. I canna do't, and I want to haste awa' doon to him to watch ower him and be near him to the last."

She moved the stone which she had pointed out to Robin Gray at the back of the chimney as the hiding-place of her savings, and drew forth a thick woollen stocking, the colour of which was faded. It was fastened with a bit of tape, and, when she had untied that, she emptied a little pile of silver and gold on the table.

"Tak what may be needed—spend it a' on him if ye can. It's a' his, was got for him, and I'll never need it mair, nor him now. A new coffin and a new grave, he maun hae that, and there's his ain siller to buy them. There's mair yet, dinna be feared if ye think that's no eneuch."

She emptied her stocking, and this time with the money—

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which amounted to about forty pounds in all—there rolled out a small packet of paper.

"Aye, the dead come to life the-day," she said, shoving the packet towards him; "that's yours—they're letters o' your mother's."

"My mother's!"

"Aye, I nursed her when she was dying at Clashgirn. She gied me thae, and tauld me to read them, and no to let onybody ken I had them, but to gie them to you if ever the day came you should need them."

"Why did ye not give them to me before?" and he held the relics reverently in his hands.

"I couldna read them, sae I just stapped them into the first safe place I could find, biding the day when ye would need them and would speir for them as I expeckit. I hope the day isn't past. I just obeyed a dying woman's will sae far's I could; but there's nae use me keeping them ony langer, seeing that my ain time's no sae far aff."

He put the letters in his pocket to examine them at the first moment he might be alone.

"You must put all this siller back, Girzie; I have taken what is necessary, and if more should be required I will come to you for it. I must run back now to the lock-up. I'll thank you another time for my poor mother's legacy."

He hastened away, leaving the woman seated before the table, her long bony arms stretched out on either side of the hoard she had striven so hard and pinched so much to save. She stared at it in a dull stupor. What sacrifices she had made for this, and now it was utterly worthless to her! She had never been able to understand why the minister called it pitiful dross. She understood now, when she found it could not give her one grain of comfort.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

## CLEARING.

"I hear the gentle rush of wings—  
I see the light of wandering stars,  
And many a budding hope upsprings  
Glittering with gowden dots and bars."—*W. B. Sangster.*

JEANIE and the others were waiting for Falcon; and as soon as he rejoined them he asked Armstrong to get him a light. The constable procured a lantern, and taking it in his hand Falcon entered Donald's cell, leaving the door partly open, so that the others might easily hear all that was said.

The man was standing leaning against the wall, his head sunk sulkily on his breast. When the rays of the lantern fell on him he roused himself, facing his visitor fiercely.

"What am I kept here for?" he growled, "I'd like to ken that. I haena done onything wrang, and by——"

He checked himself, and the expression of savage wrath on his visage changed to one of terror. Falcon had raised the lantern so that the light fell on his own face, and it was the recognition of it which caused the prisoner's alarm.

"You ken me, I think, Donald," said Falcon coolly.

The man's lips moved, but he did not speak.

"We have not been the best of friends formerly," Falcon proceeded; "but we'll maybe make amends for that yet. I have come to help you out o' your scrape, if you're sensible enouh to take help."

Donald began to recover himself; the voice was perfectly human, and dispelled the fright which the speaker's sudden appearance had created.

"I hae done naething to bring me into the scrape," he said surly, "and I'd like to ken by whase orders I'm here."

"By mine, then, if it does ye ony good to ken."

"Yours!—then ye're a doomd scoundrel, and as sune's I get the use o' my hands, I'll gie yc something to mind for't," he growled.

"Toots, man, keep your temper, or it'll be a long while before ye get the free use o' your hands again."

"What hae I done?"

"Maybe you did not think there was much harm in it at the time, but a' your trouble is just brought on ye by the lee ye told Cairnieford's wife when ye went for her with the gig on Tuesday last."

Donald turned his face sulkily away from the light.

"I ken naething about what ye say."

"O, aye, do ye."

"If I did it, it's nane o' your business."

"I'm thinking ye'll find it mair my business than ye would like to own. Just come out here."

Falcon pushed open the door and stepped out of the cell.

Donald saw that there were others outside, and made no movement to follow, although he had been eager enough a moment before to get a breath of fresh air.

At a sign from Falcon, Geordie Armstrong strode into the cell, gripped the prisoner by the collar, and dragged him out.

"That's the man," cried Jeanie, recognizing him instantly, and wondering that she had failed to do so when she had first seen him on board the *Ailsa*.

But he had been far from her thoughts at that time, and it was only when sitting in the lawyer's office trying to remember any peculiarity of the messenger whose falsehood had brought about so much misery, that certain movements of his body, the gruff tones of his voice, and his figure, had gradually become associated in her mind with those of Carrach's accomplice on board the schooner. It was like the discovery of an object which the eye has registered, whilst the mind has been occupied with other things. Absent, she could not have described any of his features; but, her suspicion once directed towards him, she identified him without hesitation.

The man hung his head sulkily and abashed. The bold assumption of knowledge with which Falcon had addressed him, and Jeanie's recognition, convinced him that further denial was useless.

"I did nae mair nor I was bidden," he muttered uneasily; "and if harm cam' o't it wasna my fault."

" You had better make a clean breast of it," advised Falcon coolly. " Holding your tongue will not help Carrach, and will do yourself some harm. Speak out and you'll save your own hide."

" What is't ye want to ken ? "

Jeanie was about to speak, but Falcon checked her with a motion of his hand.

" Where were you on Monday night ? " he asked.

" I was at Clashgirn wi' the skipper, wha had got word frae the Laird to come late and tap at his window without letting onybody see us."

" Did you stay there all night ? "

" Aye ; I slept on the floor and the skipper on a big chair. We gaed awa' before the folk were astear in the morning, and walked up by to Askaig, but we didna gang to the house."

" Did you hear any conversation between the Laird and Carrach ? "

" Na ; they gaed ben the house and talked in another room."

" Who instructed you as to what you were to do ? "

" The Laird himself in the morning before we left the house. He tauld me what to say, and was particular to get me to say it exack as he direckit. He said there was nae harm in't ; it was just a bit fun he wanted to hae wi' ye and Cairnieford. He gied the skipper and me baith plaids to put on, no to let us be ken'd ; and he gied me a bonnet besides."

" Go on ; tell everything. What did ye do when ye got as far as Askaig ? "

" We hung about till afternoon, when, as had been arranged, a chiel' brocht the gig frae Clashgirn to the ford. The skipper speired at him if he had been sent to seek Falcon, and he said aye. Syne the skipper took the reins frae him and told him he might go home. As soon as the chiel' was weel awa', I took the gig doon to Cairnieford, and delivered my errand as ye ken. I took Mistress Gray to Askaig and left her in the house, while I gaed awa', pretending to seek somebody to let us ken what had come o' her guidman.

"That was what I was told to do if there was naebody in the house. If Rab Keith had been there I was to send him awa' on a gowk's errand to seek the Laird. If ye had been there I was just to leave Mistress Gray wi' ye and drive awa' as fast as I could. I drove to the end of the loaning, where the skipper was waiting for me. He bade me drive on to Ayr and bide there for him; as he wanted to see the end o' the play he couldna gang wi' me. I ken'd weel eneuch that though he let on that he just wanted to see the upshot o' the fun, he was anxious to see ye safe awa' frae the place. I did as I was bidden and drove on to Ayr, and that's a' I ken o' the matter, barring that when the skipper joined me, he told me that ye had fa'en ower the Brownie's Bite, and was drooned. So help me, Heaven, I hae spoken the truth to the best o' my belief."

"He told you that I was drooned? When did he join ye?"

"On Thursday night. I mind the time quite weel, because he explained to me that we were to clear the *Ailsa* next day, and to come up by to the Links for instructions frae the Laird."

Further questioning only served to confirm this statement, and obtain no other information except that the skipper's intention to lie off the port of Ayr to complete the crew had been changed in consequence of having Mistress Gray on board, as he was afraid that by any accident she might escape him, or find means of communicating with the shore.

Falcon told him that if what he had said proved to be true, he had nothing to fear for his safety. Donald asseverated its truthfulness with an oath, and was locked up in his cell again to await the fiscal.

Jeanie's eyes were bright with hope and gratitude. The darkness through which she had been so wearily groping was clearing at last; and James Falcon's was the hand which had brought the light. She was glad of that and proud of it—proud to know that she had not loved an unworthy man. Robin would own his worthiness too; he would be forced to own it when he learned that he owed his life to the man whom he had cursed as his cruellest foe. It was a selfish

feeling, perhaps, but now that his danger was passing away she could not help being gratified at the thought of how completely his suspicions and accusations would be confounded.

"The warst is by now, Jeamie," she said, resting her hand on his arm and looking in his face with sweet thankfulness. "Mister Carnegie canna say ony mair that there's nae direct proof against the Laird."

Falcon turned his face from her ; he could not yet look at it, and hear that low tender voice, without feeling his resolution disturbed. It was a bitter delight to him still to be near her under any conditions ; and his heart rose in mutiny against the task he had undertaken for her sake ; for every step he advanced brought him nearer to the moment when face and voice must fade from him for ever.

He could only steady himself by taking the bit between his teeth, as it were, and hurrying on with the work of self-immolation : every pause was full of pain.

"I hope the worst is by," he answered, clearing his throat ; "but Robin Gray will not be safe until we hae some evidence as to who struck Wattie Todd. As yet we can only prove that Carrach was at Askaig *during the day* ; the crime was committed at night."

"But what we ken now will force the Laird to speak?" (anxiously).

"He'll say nothing as long as it's possible to avoid it. But you go down wi' Hutcheson to Mr. Carnegie and tell him about Donald. I'll join you in half an hour. I must go now and arrange about the burial of Wattie, as I promised Girzie. The fiscal will maybe hae come by that time, and after I see him we'll ken what to do next."

Falcon went up the street to the wright's. The wright was the undertaker of the town as well as the carpenter. He was not in the house at the time, but one of his children ran off to seek him. Whilst Falcon waited he took out the packet of his mother's letters Girzie had given him, and opened it, with the memory of a pale sad face rising out of the long-ago to soften the bitterness of the present.

Jeanie, on entering the lawyer's office, found herself in the presence of the fiscal and the Laird. The latter started at sight of Hutcheson, but recovered himself immediately, and said, in his sleek pawky way, that he was "very glad to see him looking sae weel after his long voyage."

The fiscal greeted Jeanie with one of his cheery smiles.

"The very person I was wanting to see," he exclaimed; "come away, Mistress Gray, and look at this."

It was a paper he had in his hand, which he extended to her. At first she thought it was the paper which she had signed as a witness to Carrach's mark. In size and fold it was exactly similar; but there did not appear to be so much writing on it as she had observed on the other at the moment of signing it.

"Examine it closely, if you please, and tell me if that is your signature," the fiscal continued, "I have had some conversation with the Laird, and it seems you lay much stress on the production of this paper, although I cannot see how it will help you, for it is nothing more than an ordinary form of receipt."

"That's no the paper I signed," said Jeanie calmly, handing it back to the fiscal.

The Laird at that dabbed his head forward, smiled benignantly, and took a pinch of snuff with the emphasis of a man who resigns all hope of convincing a stubborn opponent.

"Not the paper," said the fiscal, without the least surprise, "how do you make that out? I have compared the signature with the one on your deposition, and another Mr. Carnegie has got, and they seem to me the same."

"Aye, the writing is like enough mine to cheat mysel' almost. But when I was signing the paper that I mean, I noticed there was a heap o' writing on't, and besides I noticed Carrach's mark. The pen had slipped wi' him in making his cross, and there were twa wee spots o' ink just above it."

The fiscal darted a side glance at the Laird, smiling all the while. The Laird took another pinch of snuff with the former emphasis.

"I can do nae mair, Mister Smart," he exclaimed meekly, "ye'll just hae to do what ye think best. Ye will admit that I hae done everything in my power to assist the inquiry."

"Certainly, certainly," responded the fiscal, in quite a friendly tone, and that decided Jeanie to say nothing about Donald's confession so long as the Laird was there to distort it by one of his plausible explanations.

"Then ye dinna think it necessary" (smiling mildly at his own joke) "to put me in chains yet?"

"I cannot see the chance of that ever becoming necessary."

Clearly the Laird had satisfied the fiscal as well as the lawyer, that the suspicions raised against him by the wife of the alleged criminal were groundless. He had been about to leave when Jeanie arrived, and he had stopped to learn the result of her examination of the receipt. He now bade them all good afternoon in the most kindly spirit, and departed.

He got his pony at the inn, and rode homeward, with a much longer face than usual, and with much more speed as soon as he got clear of the Port. Somehow that threat Jeanie had spoken when he had felt himself so secure from discovery was haunting him—"Day and night I'll follow ye frae this hour out until God pleases to do my man justice."

That was what she had said, and the words had clung to his memory with curious distinctness. In spite of himself, his mind repeated them again and again as he rode homeward in the rapidly darkening winter gloaming.

The Laird had barely quitted the lawyer's office, when Falcon entered it with singular excitement in his voice and manner. He addressed himself abruptly to Mr. Carnegie, without appearing to notice the presence of others.

"Did you know Hugh Sutherland?"

The lawyer opened his eyes at this sudden recalling of a man who had been dead nearly sixteen or seventeen years, and who had been away from the place six years or more previously.

"Do you mean the former laird of Clashgirn?"

"Yes—him."

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"To be sure I ken'd him, but that's about twenty-five years syne. What about that?"

"Would you know his handwriting?"

"I could not say, it's such a long while since I saw it. But there was some correspondence between us regarding the case of Sutherland *versus* Johnstone, which was a question as to the miller's right to draw water from the burn above Cairnieford. As the case was one of great importance, I preserved all the documents, and among them letters I received from Mr. Sutherland whilst I was in Edinburgh, and before he joined me there."

"Have you got them now?"

"Yes—somewhere" (looking vaguely round the office, and at various deed-boxes).

"Look them out, they'll be needed."

He turned to Jeanie, and catching her hand he pressed it tightly.

"I think the means to force the truth from the Laird are in my hands now," he said agitatedly; "wait here till I come back, and if you, sir," (to the fiscal) "can be here three hours from this, I'll have some important information to give you, I expect. I want you to come with me, Hutcheson."

"I will be here at the time you mention," said the fiscal; "I have plenty to occupy me till then. But where are you going in such haste?"

"To seek McWhapple."

"You'll find him at home, I believe."

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## CHAPTER XLVIII.

"Mesh'd in the net himself had twined,  
What subterfuge could Denzil find?  
He told me with reluctant sigh  
That hidden here the tokens lie."—*Scott.*

THE candles were lit in the Laird's room, and a bright fire imparted a warm glow of comfort to everything around. The

Laird himself was seated in his big chair busy with a book of accounts. Whatever nervousness he might have displayed when he first learned that he was suspected of complicity with Carrach, he was now as calm and methodical as when he felt his respectability most impregnable; and his yellow visage with the pale blinking eyes was as expressionless.

The door was rudely pushed open without warning and Falcon entered. He was flushed with rapid walking, and his eyes glistening with unabated excitement, although he was making violent efforts to control it.

The Laird looked up quietly, and, observing who had made this unceremonious entrance, methodically closed his account book, wiped his pen, and spoke—

“Od, it’s extraordinar’! I didna expect the pleasure o’ seeing you. A fine babble you hae brought us a’ into.”

Falcon had closed the door, and he stepped up to the table opposite the Laird. The latter leaned back on his chair, clasping his hands before him, and blinking, but unmoved, meeting the penetrating gaze fixed on him.

“You’re no looking weel,” observed the Laird complacently, as the other did not speak, “and you seem out o’ breath. Will you hae a dram?”

This equanimity irritated him; but he was determined not to lose command of his temper, and so answered decisively and with forced calmness—

“I require nothing, thank you, but your close attention to what I have to say.”

“Ye’ll get that; but ye may as weel sit down.”

Falcon, instead of accepting the invitation, looked at the man, amazed and puzzled that he could remain apparently so completely undisturbed when ruin and the gallows were at his elbow. He drew a long breath, renouncing all attempt to solve the problem at that moment, and proceeded abruptly—

“Have you made up your mind what to do about Cairnieford? Are you to speak out what you know and save him, or are you to hold your tongue and let him take his chance? That’s the first thing I want to know.”

"Od, it's extraordinar!" (with a mild expression of amused astonishment). "You're on that tack too. Weel, I would hae thought that you wouldna hae been sorry to find Mistress Gray a widow."

"No matter what you would hae thought, and, extraordinary as it may seem to you," (growing firmer and more self-possessed as he proceeded) "I mean to help him out of his scrape, and I mean you to give me the power to do so."

"Really? Do ye think I carry his free pardon in my pouch?"

"You carry it in your knowledge of what Carrach has done and what you directed him to do."

"Would a ween auld bills o' lading and maybe an auld log or twa be ony use to ye?"

"You are disposed to treat the matter lightly, sir, but you will find it serious enough before it ends."

"To my thinking it's serious enough enow to thae wha are interested—I'm no."

"You will be when I tell you that Donald has confessed."

The Laird's head dabbed quickly forward, and immediately he leaned back again, smiling meekly; but the thin lips were not quite so firm as they had been. Evidently he had forgotten Donald, or he would have anticipated the danger and been prepared for it.

"Weel, what has he confessed?"—(quietly)—"that he saw me ding the lad ower the Bite?"

"He has confessed enough to implicate you to such an extent that it will not be easy for you to clear yourself."

"We'll see about that when we ken what he's got to say against me."

"You know very well what he has got to say about you; and now answer my question—are you to speak before it is too late and save Cairnieford?"

"Once for all then, I have nothing to say that will help him."

And he took a pinch of snuff with the emphatic air of a man who declines to say a word more on any consideration.

" You are determined not to help him ? "

" Quite."

" I hope you will change your mind " (drawing out the packet of his mother's letters).

" Ah, you're a young man yet, and saé you're confident " (with a species of benignant pity for his inexperience). " Why, man, if I ken'd o' onything that could help him and wouldna hurt me, do ye think I wouldna haé told it at once ? And if, on the other hand, I ken'd onything that the telling o' would hurt mysel', do ye think me likely to tell it so long as I could hide it ? It's against nature to think so."

" I never thought you would tell anything so long as you could hide it ; I have too strong a proof in my hand of your hiding capabilities to imagine that. But when a man is likely to be stripped of every penny he possesses, and to be hung into the bargain, I think it is probable that he would be disposed to save his neck, and obtain the means of living quietly in some remote corner, if he could do so by speaking the truth for once in his life."

" I have always admired the truth ; and have no doubt a man placed as ye suppose would act so. But that's no my case, thank guidness."

" That is exactly your case."

" Aye ? I would be glad to ken how you make that out ? "

" I must begin then by referring to the event which placed me under your care."

This time the Laird almost started to his feet, but again chocked himself, leaned back, reclasping his hands and smiling feebly, while his complexion became sallower than Falcon had ever seen it, except on one occasion when he had been an invalid for several weeks.

" That's an event I haé reason to be proud o', so far as I am concerned," said the Laird in his martyr voice ; " though I scarcely think you haé conducted yoursel' toward me in a way to make it pleasant for ye to mention the benefits I conferred on you and your mother. Pur woman, she was in sair need o' a friend when she found me."

Falcon found it difficult to restrain his temper at this patronizing speech ; but he just paused a moment, and the thought of Jeanie helped him.

" You have many a time reminded me of the benefits you conferred on us, and no doubt I ought to have been exceedingly grateful—and I was, Heaven knows, until your eternal boastings of your own goodness rendered yourself and my gratitude alike contemptible."

" I'll no say a word about you, but you were ay a thrawart lad ; and onything I said or did was just to imbue ye wi' a proper Christian spirit."

" Your efforts seemed to me to lie rather in the way of exalting your own charity. You made me feel that so much, that on one occasion—it was when you refused to let me have Askaig—I reminded you that there were folk who said you had other reasons than those of charity for helping me and my mother."

" Folk say queer things in this world, Jeamie" (with a sigh).

" But the queer things they hinted at in this case were true."

" Do ye think sae ?" (the eye blinking at him curiously).

" I know it."

" Maybe ye'll let me know it too, then ?"

" That is what I am here for" (opening one of the letters).  
" You became factor to Mr. Hugh Sutherland, the proprietor of Clashgirn, five years before he quitted the country."

" Quite true, and I had ken'd him a while before that."

" During the year in which he left home, you introduced him to an Irish gentleman, who was reported to be on a visit to some friends at Ayr. His real name was O'Coighly, although you called him Captain Jones. The Captain invited Mr. Sutherland to meet him at his friends' house, and when Mr. Sutherland went to the house in Ayr he met six other men. He then discovered that they were members of what was called a sub-committee of a secret society, known as the United Scotsmen, which was in connection with another secret society called the United Irishmen. The objects of both were the overthrow of the Government and the establishment of a republic."

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"Aye, aye!" exclaimed the Laird, with affected interest, but moving his chair uncomfortably.

"Mr. Sutherland was much alarmed to find himself in such company, and afterwards forbade Captain Jones, or O'Coighly, to come to Clashgirn. Soon after that various persons were seized by the Government and convicted of sedition. Mr. Sutherland, being naturally a timid man, was alarmed by these trials, and you took advantage of his terror to represent to him that a criminal information had been laid against him, and persuaded him to save his property by assigning it over to you and to save himself by flight to France."

"I told him nothing but the truth."

"I need not repeat to you the numerous pretexts by which you kept him from returning to his native country. At last he began to suspect the trick which had been played upon him. You had, under the pretence of bad harvest and failing tenants, so reduced your remittances to him that you barely left him enough to live upon. In several of your letters you admitted that the transfer of the estate to you was only a trick; but at the end, when he threatened you with his immediate return, you set him at defiance by telling him to come and see what court would accept his explanation, that to save himself from the consequences of his connection with the seditious society of United Scotsmen, he had made over his property to you."

"I never wrote that" (nervously).

"Further, you told him that the estate was yours," Falcon went on, "and that he would have to take it from you by the power of the law if he could. You knew the man you were dealing with; you knew that he would never have courage to take the matter into court, and you trusted that he had no friend with sufficient influence over him to persuade him to come boldly forward and trust to the justice of our laws to restore his property. He had such a friend, however, in the person of an Irish exile, named Dornay, who, with his only relative, a daughter, was living in the same house in which Mr. Sutherland lodged. Under Dornay's direction he proceeded to

draw up a statement of the case ; but before it was completed Dornay died.

"Mr. Sutherland soon afterwards married his late friend's daughter, and for five years was always proposing to carry out the plan suggested by his friend ; but his resolution was too weak to permit him to take the necessary steps. Meanwhile his wife had a son—"

"If ye mean Miss Dornay as his wife, I'm in a position to say they were never married."

"His wife had a son," repeated Falcon with clenched teeth, "and when that son was five years old, Mr. Sutherland died, bequeathing to his wife your letters and his own statement of the case duly signed and witnessed. You sent Mrs. Sutherland money, and condoled with her in such a manner, that the friendless wife, believing the hypocritical professions of friendship and regret you made, gathered what little money she could, and, although weak and ill at the time, and wholly unfit for such a journey, came here with her child. She hoped that when she saw you she would be able to persuade you to restore to her son the property out of which you had cheated his father, without the necessity of legal proceedings. She was eager to try the experiment, more especially because she had not the means of meeting even the preliminary expenses of taking the matter into court.

"She arrived here almost penniless, ill, fatigued, and dying. You saw her condition, and you speculated on her death. You knew if she had gone away from this house your tenure of Clashgirn would have been brought to a speedy end. With the cunning and hypocrisy which have enabled you to succeed in so many things, and to blind the eyes of honest men as to your real character for so long, you received her into the house. Pretending that you were not sure whether or not it would be quite safe for herself or her child to be known under their proper names, you persuaded her to assume the name of Falcon for a few days. Your apparent readiness to serve her blinded her, and she consented.

"You had her conveyed to a bed, and she never rose again.

During the six days of her illness you called in no doctor, and you permitted only one person to see her beside yourself. You no doubt calculated that you could trust to that person's fidelity to your interests if occasion demanded the trust. Mrs. Sutherland, however, was completely deceived by you almost to the day of her death; but then her eyes became clearer. Without your knowledge she obtained pen and ink. She added to her husband's statement an account of your conduct to her, and folded it up with your letters and other documents which she had brought with her from France. She gave the packet to the woman who nursed her, and who had shown herself friendly, telling her to read the contents and give the packet to her son whenever he might require them.

"Mrs. Sutherland died. You buried her as Mrs. Falcon, the unfortunate wife of an unfortunate gentleman whom you had once slightly known; and out of charity you brought up her son as your drudge and dependant. You made a good deal of capital out of that act of benevolence; but I think you have been a little too cunning for yourself in some respects. There were a few people who suspected the truth, and did not hesitate to say so. Not very long ago I refused to listen to their suspicions, because I thought even listening to them was ingratitude to you. Now I know their suspicions to have been true. That packet, which my dying mother entrusted to her nurse, was delivered to me to-day—this is it in my hand. I have repeated these facts to satisfy you that it is no empty threat I make in telling you that I hold the power to ruin you, perhaps to hang you."

The Laird had made numerous attempts to interrupt this recital; he had shown benignant pity for the speaker, then indignation, then injured innocence, graduating back to indignation. But Falcon, with pitiless and stern aspect, had gone on, compelling him to hear. The eyes of the Laird seemed to sink as he listened, and the blue lines beneath them deepened in hue, while the visage became of a sickly yellow complexion.

"Oom—hoo," exclaimed the Laird slowly, when Falcon at length paused: "and wha was't gied ye thae interesting papers?"

'Girzie Todd.'

The Laird, with a sharp little cry, and an extraordinary agility, sprang from his chair and clutched at the documents Falcon was holding in his hand. But they were withdrawn from his reach in time; he was pushed back, and he stood, his shrivelled body quivering with baffled rage, and his eyes glaring and blinking at his own accuser.

There was no hypocrisy now; for once in his life Nicol McWhapple stood uncovered. He struggled hard to regain his self-possession, and a species of petulant venom obtained the place of his blind fury. He laughed shrilly as he gasped—

"I was—just making fun—when I pretended that I wanted to snatch the papers *frae ye*. What do ye come here to me wi' this story for? If ye think it's true, and ye can prove it, why do ye no gang to a lawyer at once and set the beagles at my heels?"

And he laughed shrilly again, his fingers moving nervously, and his eyes hungrily watching Falcon's hand.

"I'll tell you why I come to you before placing the matter in the hands of the authorities. Had you given me Askaig when I asked for it, you would have been safe to-day. As it is, your infernal trickery has so marred the dearest hopes of my life that I do not care a single straw for the wealth or position it is in my power to claim."

"Very kind o' you, that."

"I come to make a bargain wi' you for Jeanie's sake. Clear Cairnieford of the false charge against him: and on the day on which he leaves the jail a free and unblemished man, I will deliver these papers to you to do with them as you please. I will leave the country, and you will never hear anything more of me or the *Colin*. Hutcheson has agreed to go with me; and you will be left to enjoy your fortune, if you can, without any fear, as far as I am concerned."

The Laird regarded him with a curious expression of wonder, suspicion, and spleen. It passed his comprehension that a man believing himself entitled to a fortune, and believing that he held the proofs necessary to obtain it, should willingly

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throw his chance away to rescue a man whom, according to the Laird's code, he should have been pleased to see removed from his way. His features curled into a sour sneer.

"Ye're unco generous at other folk's expense," he said presently; "bide a wee and I'll gie ye my answer to your proposition."

He limped over to the door, looked out to see that the lobby was clear, closed the door again, and faced Falcon with a mocking look.

"We're by oursel's, and for ony use ye may make o' what I say, it's just my word against yours; and I'll trust to my respectability, that I hae devoted my life to earn, to weigh the scale down on my side. So I can permit mysel' the pleasure o' speaking my mind freely for once."

"It will be a treat, no doubt," rejoined Falcon coolly; and placing the packet of papers in his pocket, he waited to know whether his terms were accepted or rejected. He could not guess the decision by any symptom in the girning politeness with which the Laird had now succeeded in cloaking his nervous fury.

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## CHAPTER XLIX.

### REYNARD RUN HOME.

"The cat has clomb to the eagle's nest,  
And suckit the eggs and scar'd the dame;  
The lordly lair is daubed wi' hair,  
But the thief maun strap an' the hawk come hame."—*Anon.*

"I HAVE mentioned to you," began the Laird with a species of spiteful deliberation, "that I always admired the truth." Falcon smiled grimly. "Ye think that funny, but it's a fact for a' that, and I'll tell ye why. It has been a principle o' mine never to deny the truth, because I always found that I could twist its conclusions to my ain ends wi' far mair ease and far mair safety than it would hae been possible to do by telling lies. For the last twenty-five years I have never told a lie that could possibly be avoided; and, consequently, folk finding so many things I said to be true, gied me credit for the rest.

On that principle I'm gaun to own the truth to you now, although when it comes to other ears I will own it with the necessary modifications for my purpose. But wi' only you to hear me, and only you to bear witness against me, ye shall hae the whole truth, unqualified."

"Thank you."

"To begin then : all you hae said about Hugh Sutherland and about his wife and his bairn—that's yourself—is quite correct. All you hae said about me is quite true ; and all you hae said about Carrach, and about my knowledge o' what he has done, is quite true. Is that no frank ?"

"Exceedingly so."

"Od, man, ye hae nae idea what a straightforward chiel' I am in my dealings. Ye hae ken'd me as the Laird, a kirk-going man with plenty o' siller ; respected by maist folk and treated wi' civility even by them that didna like me and were ay ready to speak ill o' me ahint my back. But I was prosperous, and that made them mum afore my face. I'll tell ye what I was : a puir ragged barefoot bairn, motherless, fatherless, and friendless ; lame, and no fit for hard work. A tailor-body took pity on me and began to learn me his trade : and at the same time he learned me to read and write. That let me see the way to something better nor a tailor's boad."

"You made good use of his lessons" (drily).

"I did that. I had been dunted about by nearly everybody, and I saw that to be weakly and puir was to be a football for whaever was strong or rich ; and I saw that the ae thing everybody respected and bowed down to, whether the owner was weak or strong, was siller. I couldna alter my body or put pith into it ; but I made up my mind to make siller. I got to be a clerk in a writer's office, and there I met Sutherland. He was a weak-headed, faint-hearted creature, wha had quarrelled wi' every friend he had in the world. I became his friend, and became his heir exactly in the way ye hae stated."

The mocking coolness, and the degree of unction with which the man confessed his villainy, rendered it difficult for

Falcon to remain quiet. He ground his teeth, determined to listen to the end.

"I'm a great villain ye would say," proceeded the Laird, observing the fierce movement of his hearer's features, and the effort by which an exclamation of anger had been checked; "say it out if it will do you any guid; there's naebody to hear ye but me, and that's neither here nor there. Weel, I became master o' Clashgirn: it cost me a heap o' wark to gain that, and it has cost me twenty years o' constant watching and contriving to make my position sure. After a' that, do you think that because ye come to me wi' a wheen papers ye hae gotten frae an auld wife, that I'm gaun to cower down before ye and do just whatever ye like to bid me?"

"You own that you have dreaded exposure, and in two hours the exposure will be made, unless you place in my hands now the means to save Cairnieford."

"I do fear exposure, and I would accept your terms maybe, if it werena that it would just be loupung out o' the frying-pan into the fire. Ane can endure the pan longest, and sae I'll bide in the pan."

"I offer you safety——"

"No, you offer me a chance of twa roads to ruin, and I prefer the longest. I can snap my thumb at your papers, onyway I can repudiate them, and I hae siller enough to carry the case frae ae law court to another until body and soul o' ye are worn out. But I canna do that wi' Carrach. So long as I say nothing about him, ye'll never get a cheep out o' him; for he'll ay be counting on me clearing him. But if I speak, he'll speak too."

"Then you admit that you are both involved in poor Watie's death?"

"Od, man, I'm admitting everything, seeing we're by oursel's, so you can believe me that there was nae thought o' violence on our part, and there would hae been nane if it hadna been for a mistake. I never believed in violence mysel', for I could ay manage far better without it: if I thought o' ony in this case it was between you and Cairnieford."

"What had he or I, or the poor woman whose life you have made miserable, done to you, that you should have wiled us into this fiendish snare?"

"Ye want to ken that? I'll tell ye" (venomously). "On the night you and me had some words about Askaig, you bragged to me that ye ken'd enough to hang me if ye liked to follow up the clue. Ye referred to what you had discovered o' our cheating the gaugers wi' the tobacco and brandy, and maybe ye had a notion o' Sutherland's case. It didna matter to me which; I never forgot your words. So I doubled the insurance on the *Colin*, and I told Carrach never to bring her hame again. I didna tell him to murder you—that might haes been done long syne when ye were a bairn if I had been disposed to violence. I just told him that I wouldna be sorry if you never came hame ony mair than the brig."

"And for that reason, I suppose, you worked your spite upon me when I returned?"

"I hoped that you had been drowned, but I wouldna haes sought to harm ye when ye came back if ye had gone away again as I advised. Instead o' that you threatened me—although ye didna ken o't at the time—wi' mair power on your side than ye had got before ye left. I feared that ye would meet Cairnieford and that he would help ye. He ay doubted me; he was the boldest of any who declared their doubts o' my dealings wi' Sutherland, and the first to suspect that Mrs. Falcon was naebody but Sutherland's wife. But on that score they had naething but suspicions, whilst I held proofs o' the upright character o' my transactions."

"You mean forgeries and lies as your proofs."

"That doesna matter. I wanted to get you out o' the country, and to prevent you meeting Cairnieford as a friend. The easiest way seemed to me just to make him suspicious o' his wife and you. If ye quarrelled and ane o' ye got killed, so much the better for me. But at the least there would be nae chance o' friendly dealings atween ye, and one or other would be sure to quit the country—I didna care which, but I had nae doubt it would be you. The plan was a braw ane,

and would hae wraught about exactly as I calculated, if it hadna been for the blundering o' that stupid brute Carrach, wha wasna content to leave the scheme to work out its ain end, but maun bide to see the upshot o't, and sae spoil everything. Would to Heaven I had never seen him."

" You dislike the man, and yet would screen him from the punishment he deserves."

" Dislike him! I do that wi' a' my heart, but I hae a strong liking for mysel'. I would be glad to get rid o' him, and when we parted last night I thought I was never to see him again. I had arranged things sae that had he been awa' for a week he would never hae daured to show himsel' in this country ony mair. I'll tell ye how: He told me a' that took place at Askaig, and I wrote it down as his confession. I got his mark to it and Jeanie Gray's signature. In a week I would hae gi'en that paper to the fiscal as though it had been sent to me privately. The fiscal would hae acted on it, and I would hae sent Carrach word, sae that to save his neck he would hae ta'en guid care to keep as far frae Portlappoch as the sea and his schooner would let him."

" Where is that paper? " (eagerly).

" In a safe place o' hiding, where neither you nor onybody will find it without my help. Had it no been for you I would hae been safe and weel the day. But ye hae been like a stane round my neck frae the first day I saw ye. Every day and every hour ye reminded me o' what was gane and by, and kept me in tortures o' fear for what might be to come; and now ye hae upset a' my schemes, and ye shake the terror o' the gallows in my face."

" I offer ye the means to escape it."

" Ye canna do that, and if ye could, I wouldna accept it frae ye" (with quivering venomous passion); "no, I'll stand my ground to the last now, for I may as weel die as lose everything I hae spent my life to win. I hae been frank wi' ye, I hae told ye everything, I hope ye're satisfied."

" I am satisfied that the gallows is too mild a retribution for such as you."

"I'm glad ye're satisfied. Do ye ken why I hae told ye this? To let ye feel that you, a strong brawny chiel', are powerless before a weak lame auld man like me. I snap my thumb at your papers and at everything ye can say or do. I trust to my respectability, and I defy ye to do your worst. Now ye can go."

Falcon made a passionate movement as if about to obey his impulse and grip the wretch by the neck to drag him at once before the fiscal. But the deliberate defiance, pronounced with all the hissing spite of a serpent, checked him.

"You have chosen your course," he cried fiercely, his passion and loathing rendering articulation difficult, "and you will find it a short one; for, by Heaven, in three hours from this I'll give Carrach a companion. You need not think to escape me. Hutcheson is here, and he will take care of you until I return."

"I hae nae intention to quit the house."

Falcon, frowning, pulled his bonnet tight over his brow; the Laird's eyes blinked, his head dabbed, and he took a pinch of snuff, snapping the lid of the box with apparent confidence and satisfaction, then he bowed mockingly as he opened the door for his visitor. At the same time the outer door was loudly slammed to and locked; and, before Falcon could cross the floor, Girzie Todd stood on the threshold.

She had a wild haggard look, and her hands worked nervously. The kerchief which was fastened over her head had fallen back, and her thin iron-grey hair was straggling over her brow. She was panting as if she had been walking a distance rapidly. Her eyes had a vacant expression until they rested on the Laird.

He had been observing her in mute wonder, and now, when she gripped his arm, he uttered a slight ejaculation of fright.

"Ye're a puir weak creatur'," she gasped in a hoarse undertone; "and ye haes brocht it a' on yoursel'."

"A' what—are ye gyte, woman? What's wrang?" he shrieked cowering.

"No, I canna let them tak' ye, muckle wrang as ye hae done me. Ye were the father o' my bairn, and I canna, canna for dead Wattie's sake, let them hang his father on the gallows if I can save him. Come awa', there's maybe time yet."

"What are ye raving about, woman? What do ye mean?"

She regarded him vaguely for an instant as if not quite understanding his question. Then, sharply—

"I mean that Mistress Begg has gien the fiscal a paper that she saw ye hiding ameath the big stane at the door. She took it out as soon as ye left the house, and it tells how my Wattie was done to death, and, O Lord, O Lord, it was by my ain brother's hand and through your ill schemes."

Sobs choked her and she covered her face. The man's hands dropped to his sides and he stood dumb, with starting eyes gazing upon her, trembling and cowering in abject terror.

"She came to me," Girzie went on hoarsely, "proud o' what she had done, and thinking I would be glad tae, when she told me that they were coming to tak' ye prisoner and that ye would be hanged. I was glad until I minded o' Wattie, and I came to help ye to rin awa' for his sake. O Jeamie Falcon, turn awa' your face if ye ever cared ought for my bairn wha died for ye. Turn awa' your face, that ye mayna be tempted to do your duty, and for his sake let me save his father frae yon cruel death if I can."

Falcon turned his back. Bitterly as he felt towards the Laird, he could not be deaf to the sad appeal of the mother who forgave so much. There was an eloquence in this rough uneducated woman's despair, and her merciful pity for the wretch who had marred her whole life, which awed him into submission. For her sake and for Wattie's, in whose name she pleaded, he was willing yet to give one chance for life to the miserable creature who, now that the blow had fallen, discovered that all his craft had failed him, and remained trembling and speechless, listening intently for any sound of the approaching enemy, and watching Girzie's haggard visage narrowly.

Even in that moment of desperate peril, he suspected the intentions of the only one in the world who was willing to raise a hand on his behalf. Incapable of one generous thought himself, he could not believe that she who had such good reasons to detest him could desire to help him. So he stood powerless to move or speak ; for the moment she told him of the discovery of the hidden confession, he knew that his cunning had overreached itself at last, and the very means he had taken with the purpose of ridding himself for ever of Carrach, and consequently of all connection with the crime, had turned upon himself. From that day on which greed and selfish fear had induced him to refuse Falcon the farm of Askraig, with what noiseless and sure steps retribution had advanced on him in spite of all his craft, until now, when it culminated in the prison and the gibbet !

"Come awa'," cried Girzie in a feverish whisper the moment she saw Falcon yield to her prayer. "Come awa', if ye want to live. We can get out by the back window and down to the stable maybe afore they come yet. The lads are a' in the kitchen enow at supper, sae naebody will see ye. Come awa'."

Whilst she spoke, she was leading or dragging him to the door of the innest room. The movement seemed to rouse him.

"Stop a minute," he gasped ; "I canna gang without siller."

He limped to his desk and tried to unlock it ; but his hand trembled so that he could not fit the key in the lock. Girzie, with a sharp cry of impatience, snatched the key from him and opened the desk. He unclosed a secret recess and took out a small leather bag.

"There's no muckle here," he groaned peevishly, "I never kept muckle in the house, and——"

Girzie dragged him away fiercely.

"Come awa', or the only siller ye'll need will be as muckle as buy a shroud."

Shuddering violently at this reminder of his position, he

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accompanied her with all the speed his terror and infirmity permitted. Girzie closed the door of the inner room and locked it.

Then Falcon drew a long breath of relief, and gazed round the apartment like one awakening from a strange dream. He felt almost stupefied by the events which had transpired, and he sat down to recover himself.

But he could not rest. He did not feel satisfied that he had done right in permitting the Laird to escape. He rose and went out to seek Hutcheson. He did not find him at the place where he had told him to wait. He called, without receiving any answer. He walked slowly in the direction of the steading, peering about him, and calling occasionally. But all he heard was the wind soughing through the trees, and presently the sound of wheels and a horse's feet rattling on the frosty road.

"The fiscal," he muttered, "what am I to say to him?"

He was startled by a shrill shriek breaking suddenly upon the night. He ran in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

Girzie had assisted the Laird through the window of his bedroom, and had followed him herself. As she had stated, the servants were at supper, and they were free from observation. They ran to the stable.

But she did not know that Hutcheson was on the watch. By the light from the kitchen window he had seen them stealing round the house. He was curious to learn the meaning of this stealthy movement, and followed.

Girzie found a lantern in the stable, which one of the men had left burning to save himself the trouble of relighting it when he returned. She saddled a horse—not the pony, but the strongest and best horse in the stable. The Laird watched her, shivering all the time, but utterly unable to assist her further than to point out the saddle and bridle.

She led the horse out, and was assisting the trembling fugitive to mount, when Hutcheson, suspecting the real meaning of this, darted forward and seized the Laird, dragging him

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back. The frenzied shriek he uttered the moment Hutcheson touched him, was the one which had startled Falcon.

Girzie heard the rattle of the approaching wheels. She was desperate; and she clasped Hutcheson's throat with her long bony fingers, in which was the strength of desperation.

"Let him go," she cried.

She was behind him, the Laird was wrestling in his grasp. He held him with one hand, whilst with the other he endeavoured to unfasten the fingers which were throttling him.

But they held so tightly that he would have been obliged to release the Laird had not the gig they had heard approaching driven up, stopped beside them, and two men jumped out.

The light from the stable enabled the Laird to recognise the fiscal and Geordie Armstrong; and uttering a stifled cry he fell to the ground writhing in a species of fit.

Girzie instantly released Hutcheson; he turned, and would have seized her, but Falcon, who had reached the spot almost instantaneously with the fiscal, stayed him.

She shrank away, seeing that it was all over, that her help had come too late.

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## CHAPTER L.

"O front of brass and brain of ass,  
With heart of hare compounded;  
How are thy boasts repaid with costs,  
And all thy pride confounded!"—*Old Ballad.*

THE paper which Mrs. Begg had seen the Laird hiding under the large stone that lay loose in front of the Clashgirn door, and which she had carried to the fiscal, revealed the manner in which Wattie Todd met his death. It purported to be written to Carrach's dictation by his mate Donald on board the schooner *Ailsa*, and showed that both Carrach and the Laird were mistaken as to the identity of the man who had fallen.

Donald, being questioned, denied all knowledge of the  
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paper, and wrote a few words of it under the seal's direction, suspending quite a different style of handwriting. Mr. Carnegie therefore readily examined the parchment, and in spite of the evident scruples of Falcon, permitted it to be McWhirter's own copy manuscript with letters in his possession which were undoubtedly written by him.

After explaining that the confession was made to ease his conscience, and to show that he was not so guilty as might be supposed, the statement proceeded—and it is only necessary to give here the portions which explain the Ende that was left dark after Donald's confession and the Laird's revelation to Falcon:—

"I hung about Askraig all day in order to make sure that James Falcon quitted the place that night. I had been drinking whisky during the night before and during the day; and I had two bottles with me when Donald went away. My head was not clear, for besides drinking much, I had not had any sleep. As the storm grew louder I stole up to the barn which faces the door of Askraig house and hid myself there. It was dark then and I had no fear of being seen.

"I saw Cairnieford arrive, and heard his horse clattering away soon afterwards. I looked out again and then crept over to the window. Cairnieford and his mistress were still there. He was Falcon. They were quarrelling. I was nearly caught by Rab Keith, but he went into the house without seeing me. I was going to creep back to the barn when Cairnieford ran out. He sought round the place, I supposed for his horse. He nearly came upon me two or three times, but it was so dark that he had no chance of seeing me except when the lightning flashed. He was muttering in a daft way to himself. I saw him pass the door again, and that was the last I saw of him.

"Rab Keith came out, shouting something that I could not hear for the noise of the spate and the wind and the rain. He came close to me, and I crept round to the back of the house to get out of his way. I do not know how long I stopped there, maybe half an hour; then I started to get to the

window again or the barn—I cannot mind which of them I was going to—but when I turned the corner of the house next the road I knocked against a man, who clutched at me and caught the end of a plaid I was wearing. He shouted something, but I broke from him and ran. I'm a heavy man, and not a quick runner. The chiel' kept at my heels, and I found myself at the fence of the Brownie's Bite.

"The chiel' gripped me again, and a flash of lightning let me see that it was Falcon who had hold of me; and I supposed that he knew me at the same time, for he grasped me tighter. I strove with him, trying to break away from him but he held on. I tried to throw him down, but he got the plaid with his teeth and his hands clasped round my neck. I got savage at that, struck him and flung him from me. I heard the fence crack, loud as the wind blew—I heard an awful skirl, loud as the spate roared—and I knew that Falcon had gone over the Bite. I ran away from the place, and will never go near it again if I can help it.

"I did not like the chiel' because he was trying to harm me. But when I struck him I had no thought of anything more than just to gar him let go; when I flung him from me I had forgot that we were on the brow of the Bite. I was not meaning to kill him; it was an accident; and it might have happened to me as well as to him. I was sorry for him; but I could not expect other folk to believe it was an accident; and so I mean to keep clear of the place. All this is solemn truth.

his  
“IVAN X CARRACH,  
mark

“Witness—JEANIE GRAY.”

This paper Jeanie identified without hesitation as the one she had signed; and the spots of ink, made by the pen slipping when Carrach had been drawing his mark, were there. Her signature to the receipt which had been placed in the fiscal's hands so freely was declared to be a forgery. That explained why the Laird had refused to show the document to Mr. Car-

negie and Jeanie. He required time to trace her name on a document which would be harmless to himself and comparatively so to Carrach.

That same night the fiscal removed his three prisoners to the safe keeping of the county jail. The Laird was in such a condition that he required constant attendance, and the doctor said he doubted if he would ever recover from the shock.

Of course there was a fine ado in the Port when scraps of the singular story got about, dressed up with all the fantastic ornaments in which gossip delights to array her subjects. The kirk folk lingered much longer than usual amongst the tombstones next day, and there was a very general opinion that Jeanie was a fine body, James Falcon was an honest lad, and that Robin Gray had been hasty. There were few who really understood the generous nature of all three, which had been so severely tried by the petty machinations of a man whose guilty conscience sought protection from unknown dangers.

Geordie Armstrong was a man of high importance on this day. His diligence had been commended by the fiscal; and everybody was anxious to speak to him, as he was supposed to know all the ins and outs of the strange story. So Geordie, who had always been sensible of his own consequence, fancied that the folk were at last beginning to recognize his merit. They had laughed at him for the many blunders he had committed in his official capacity when, as he thought—with some reason possibly—that most of them would have made the same blunder under the same circumstances.

For instance, when Adam Lindsay's cow had been "lifted," Geordie had set off in hot pursuit of the thief to Glasgow in consequence of having been told that a man had been seen driving a cow in that direction. He had not paused to learn what the beast or the man was like, and on his way to the city he had overtaken several cows and several men. Having thus a selection of possible criminals he made his choice accordingly. But to the utter confusion of his charge,

the cow proved to be a fine stirk ; and soon afterwards good reasons were found for believing that Lindsay's beast had been driven off to Sanquhar, the direction upon which Geordie had obstinately turned his back.

He was much laughed at for this and similar misadventures ; but he had at length obtained an opportunity to distinguish himself, and he made the most of it.

He was up early on this Sabbath morning, and before kirk-time he took a stroll down by the Links. He passed the place where Jeanie had been seized by Carrach, but of course the mounds displayed no traces of a struggle, and the tide had washed out all imprints on the beach. Geordie had taken his notion of seeking corroboration of Mrs. Gray's statement of her forcible abduction from the fact that the fiscal had made much of the footprints on the brow of the Brownie's Bite, and he began to think that he was to be disappointed.

With his disappointment he began to scent a new mystery. What if he should be able to present quite a new version of the affair—or, at any rate, that part of it which related to Mrs. Gray's voyage ? Vanity assumes the most dangerous shape when it tempts a man to an effort to prove his own exceeding cleverness. Geordie was exactly in that state of mind now.

He looked about with profound suspicion of something not perfectly correct in Mrs. Gray's deposition. Luckily for himself, and perhaps for others, whilst he looked and meditated he discovered the small anchor by which Carrach had secured the boat when he landed. The Laird having cut the rope to bind Jeanie, the anchor had been forgotten in the Highlander's hurry to get away with his double prize. Geordie was unable to associate the anchor with the affair, but he took it in charge on suspicion, as he would have done the beach itself if he had only been able to carry it on his shoulder. Marching off with his discovery and crossing the Links, he next found Jeanie's plaid.

That changed the whole current of his thoughts. For although he did not recognize the plaid as Mrs. Gray's, not

being afflicted with too many ideas at a time—which might have led to the suggestion that the plaid belonged to somebody else—he at once concluded that it was hers, and became as pompously proud to be able to present corroboration of her testimony as he might have been to throw doubt on it.

He made the most of his discovery to the few farmers and townsfolk whom he was disposed to admit to any degree of confidence on this important occasion. It really proved of some little advantage in the long chain of evidence which had been welded together through so many remarkable events.

There seemed to be no chink by which the culprits might hope to escape; and much as the Laird had been looked up to in the town as a man of means and an elder, there was little sympathy expressed for his miserable position, even amongst those douce bodies with whom he had most associated. It was hard, perhaps, but it was none the less just; all the years he had spent in greedy striving after respect had only obtained for him the outward show of it, and that not from many. There was no heart in it; there had been none in his own hard dry nature to influence that of others by the magical attraction of sincerity. He had offered to his little world a mockery of piety and truth, and he obtained in return a mockery of respect.

Those who had disliked him and openly shown it in the day of his prosperity were mercifully silent now. But those who had disliked him and restrained their tongues, either in consequence of his position or in doubt of their own convictions, spoke now in many voices. Those who had bartered with him, and consulted with him on affairs of kirk or burgh, marvelled that they had been so long deceived by him. None pitied him.

But everybody pitied Girzie Todd. All day there were little groups of fishers, townsfolk and country folk, at the cross, about the market-place, at door-steps, and down at the Port, in grave consultation about the whole business. A few kindly neighbours sought Girzie, with the hope of “cheering her a wee;” but her cot was empty; and Dawnie, the cuddie,

was ungratefully taking advantage of the occasion, to make a raid through the patch of garden, and feast on the green "curlies." He was driven into his shed, and made fast. One sensible dame, who had been the first to enter Girzie's house, finding the little heap of money on the table, had, after a moment's wonder at the wealth which was thus carelessly exposed to the first rogue who might happen to enter, gathered it up, replaced it in the old stocking which was lying beside it, and hid the precious parcel under the bed, to be ready for the rightful owner when she might return.

There was no doubt entertained as to the cause of Girzie's absence. She had gone to Clashgirn to watch by dead Wattie's side, until the morning came when he was to be buried.

As soon as she had seen her attempt to enable McWhapple to escape frustrated, she had turned away with the bitter resignation of one who feels that a judgment has fallen, and who is conscious that all effort to withstand it is futile. It did not surprise her; she had expected it from the moment she had learned the truth from Mrs. Begg; and although she had tried to save the man, she had done so with little hope of success. Now she was satisfied; there was nothing left for her to do but submit to the fate in which she recognized the retribution of the past.

She had crept up to the dark room where the body was lying, and crouched down beside it. She uttered no moan, no despairing wail now. In a sort of stupor she remained; and to everybody who ventured to look in on her with kindly intent to offer her food or comfort, she would not answer otherwise than by a dull absent stare, which frightened the simple folks. Even Falcon could not obtain more from her than a piteous request that he would leave her alone with her bairn. He obeyed her; for he saw that the attempt to console only irritated her.

He was himself in a state of irritation, which all the efforts of Hutcheson failed to soothe. In a rough hearty way the sailor endeavoured to present a cheery view of the future to his comrade; for his own part he could not understand how a

man coming into a considerable fortune, as Falcon was, could hang his head and look discontented.

"Man, what's the use o' fortune," exclaimed the master of Clashgirn, "when one has lost the power to enjoy it? What's the use o' a horse to a man that can neither ride nor drive?"

"He can learn to do baith," answered Hutcheson readily.

Falcon turned away from him abruptly: it was impossible to make him see or feel as he did. But he was sensible that his conduct must appear contradictory to other persons, and he did not blame Hutcheson for being puzzled by it. He had striven so hard to achieve a certain end, and now that it seemed so near realization, he was behaving as if he would have liked to undo all that he had done. That did seem ridiculous.

But he had no desire to undo it; nay, he said to himself that, if the circumstances were to be repeated, he could not act otherwise than he had done. It was only the reaction of the excitement he had been undergoing which made him restless and gloomy. Whilst there had been work for him to do, whilst Robin Gray's fate was uncertain, and Jeanie's pale anxious face was spurring him to exertion, he had not had time to think much of the future. But the work accomplished, the strain relaxed, and he saw that with his own hand he had helped to raise the mountain which separated him for ever from the one creature in the world who could have given his life purpose and joy. He would not have been human if some of the old bitterness had not returned to disturb his peace. He wished with all his soul that there had never been such a person as Robin Gray in the world, although he could not wish that he had refused his help in saving him from an unmerited doom.

"Look here, mate," said Hutcheson—they were down by the shore, the only place where Falcon felt at all at ease; "I ken what's wrang wi' ye. You're in a way about your auld lass. Weel, wha kens whether she mayna be a widow ere lang."

Falcon started and looked angry at this utterance of a

thought which had once occurred to himself, and which he had manfully cast from him.

"I'm owing you one or two good turns, Hutcheson," he said, griping him by the arm and shaking him to make his words more emphatic; "but if ye say that again we'll hae a quarrel."

"As broken ships hae come to land," muttered Hutcheson, but he discreetly kept the opinion to himself.

"I would be ashamed for mysel' if I could find ony pleasure in waiting for a dead man's shoon," Falcon went on proudly, but with more of sorrow than anger in his tone now. "No, Hutcheson, if ever I'm to ken what pleasure is again, it'll be out yonder on the sea amidst storm and battle."

"Do ye mean to say ye're gaun to sea again, now that ye hae got a fortune and can do as ye like?"

"I'm going as soon as ever my affairs are settled, and Mistress Gray's guidman is safe delivered from jail."

Hutcheson began to whistle, remembering that it was Sabbath he checked himself, but said nothing. He liked Falcon more and more every day, and he had his own opinion about the whole business, which was that it might have been better for all parties if it had been Cairnieford who had tumbled over the Brownie's Bite instead of daft Wattie Todd. He had a presentiment that something might happen yet to alter the present aspect of affairs, and so he held his tongue and waited.

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## CHAPTER LI.

### IN PRISON.

"Brightest climes shall mirk appear,  
Desert ilka blooming shore;  
Till the fates, nae mair severe,  
Friendship, love, and peace restore."—*Anon.*

THE sudden revulsion from doubt to confidence which had taken place in Robin Gray's breast at the revelation of Jeanie's faith in him, left him in utter shame of the cruel ignominy he had cast on her; in utter shame of the passion

which had betrayed him, and transformed a man of some common sense into a mad blind fool. He had smarted sharply for it all after she had left him, and there was scarcely an epithet of contempt which he had not applied to himself.

But the revulsion had given him hope, too. He had, previous to her visit, been indifferent as to how the charge might stand against him; he did not mean to make the least effort to save himself, and had not Mr. Carnegie taken up the case promptly on his own authority, the person most concerned would not have instructed him to do it.

But now he was like a man who had been shut up in a dark cell, and who is suddenly lifted out to the broad glare of the sun. The light dazzled him at first, and he scarcely knew what he was to do. She had said, "Dinna be dooncast," and "Take courage!" and the words and the voice remained with him, cheering and comforting him.

He did take courage, and the first act of his new spirit was to get the fiscal to send for Jeanie that he might have her forgiveness before he made any effort to save his life. Until he knew that she would forgive him, he did not care to live; if she refused, it would be easier for him to accept the fate which threatened him than to endure perhaps years of torture.

The fiscal good-naturedly sent a messenger to the lawyer's office to inquire for Mrs. Gray; but she had gone from there, and Mr. Carnegie begged that she might not be interfered with at present.

Cairnieford had waited impatiently for the return of the messenger, and he would have had him start again in search of Jeanie; but the fiscal advised him to be calm and wait, especially as there was no time then to seek her. He yielded, because he could not help himself, and that afternoon he was conveyed to the county prison to await the issue of events.

He had little fear that the result would prove his innocence, however strong the proof might appear against him then. It was not the verdict of judge and jury he dreaded. It was Jeanie's verdict which concerned him most. If she could only see him then; if she could only hear him whilst the

shadow of the scaffold was still lowering on him, she might be able to feel how bitterly he repented the folly and the wrong which in his frenzy he had perpetrated.

The night passed, and she did not come. He moved about restlessly in his narrow cell during the dark hours. He could not sleep, and the events of the week flitted across his brain with the vividness of reality. The Laird was at the bottom of it all ; it was his infernal sneers which had first started his suspicions, and his own fury had done the rest. He cursed the pitiful wretch with all the fierceness of which his nature was capable.

When dawn came, and a pale streak of light penetrated the cell, he was exhausted by the night of torture he had spent, and he stretched himself on the rough bed of straw ; but not to sleep. He lay listening to every step that crossed the stone corridors, sickening with disappointment when it stopped short of his door or passed by it.

The day passed like the night, and still there had come no message. He was wrought up to a pitch of nervous excitement which threatened a violent fever, when at a late hour the fiscal himself entered the cell with a lantern in his hand, and a grin on his face. He took a good survey of the prisoner before he spoke.

Robin stared at him with the blank expression of one in doubt whether the person he sees is friend or foe ; and then, eagerly approaching him, he cried—

“ Is onything wrang, sir ? Hae ye ony news for me ? Is my wife weel, or—— ”

“ Quietly, quietly, Cairnieford,” interrupted the fiscal in his cheeriest tone ; “ one question at a time, if ye please, and before I say a word, understand this : I am here as your friend, not the fiscal. You see as your friend I may speak to you in a way that would scarcely do if I were here in my official capacity.”

“ I understand, sir, and thank ye. It’s kind o’ ye, I’m sure ; and ye may count on me laying nae stress on what ye may say if ye should need to alter your words héreafter.”

He was choking with anxiety to hear something about Jeanie; he did not think of asking anything about his own fate.

"That's right," said Mr. Smart; "and I'm glad to say that I hae good news for ye."

"She's weel, then—she'll come to see me again?"

"Your guidwife?—Oh, aye, she was brawly when I saw her last, about three hours syne; and I hope ye'll be able to save her the trouble o' coming to see ye here by going to see her yourself."

"Eh—what?"

"Now, mind, it's Matthew Smart, no the fiscal, that's speaking."

"Aye, aye, I mind."

"Weel, then, there's been a mistake some way. The fiscal was misled by the information he got; but he's no a fool, and he's no afraid to own a mistake, especially when the circumstances were of such a kind as to mislead anybody. So the chances are, that, as soon as the needful formalities hae been gone through, you'll be set free. That will be, maybe, on Monday forenoon."

"Free!" echoed Cairnieford, puzzled to know by what magic his position had been so happily changed.

"Aye, free, that's the word, and as clear o' ony suspicion o' guilt as if ye had never been here. I told you at the time I would rather that anybody had had the job but me, and I come here now to show ye that I spoke honestly by giving ye the earliest news o' your good luck."

"But how—how has it come about? I'm dazed a wee by it a'—it's sae sudden."

"You hae your guidwife—I wish half the women folk had half her sense and courage—you hae her to thank and James Falcon."

"Falcon!" roared Cairnieford, starting bewildered, and frowning.

"Aye, just him; it wasna him, but Girzie Todd's lad, Wattie, wha was killed. That was what misled me—I mean the fiscal."

And then he explained all that had occurred as it had been laid before him, always reminding his interlocutor that he spoke purely in his private character as a friend, and that something might happen before Monday to cause him to speak quite differently as an officer of justice. He had no fear of that, however; and being a kindly-hearted man he was really glad of the opportunity to redeem, in some measure, the inconvenience—to say nothing of the peril—which Cairnieford had suffered from the singular combination of circumstances which had led to his incarceration.

When he had finished he was surprised to find Robin silent and even gloomy.

“Why, man, what’s wrang wi’ ye?” exclaimed Mr. Smart. “I thought ye would haen been louping for joy; instead o’ that ye look as though I had brought word that your execution would take place on Monday.”

“Falcon no dead,” he muttered abstractedly, his hands wandering nervously over his head, whilst he stared hard at the floor.

“No!—are ye sorry for that?”

Robin was roused by the sharp question.

“Sorry?—the Lord forbid. It’s a shame o’ me to look ungrateful; but, man, if ye had tholed what I hae tholed on his account ye wouldn’t find it an easy matter to accept sae muckle favour at his hands. Lord forgie me, but I feel amraig though as I would rather hae been left here to dee than owe my life to aught that he has done. Maybe it’s because I hae done him sic sair wrang that his kindness dunts sae hard on me.”

“Hoots, man, that’s no like the honest chiel’ I took ye for. But ye’ll think better o’t before Monday; and I hope then ye’ll gie the lad your hand, and say you’re sorry for your mistake, as I hae done wi’ you.”

The fiscal retired, and Robin, in the dark again, sat down on his stool, covering his face with his hands. He winced cruelly as he thought how much more noble James Falcon must appear in her eyes than he could ever hope to do.

“But he wasna tempted as I hae been,” he muttered bitterly;

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"he wasna deceived as I hae been, or he couldna hae shown himsel' ony better nor me."

How his name was coupled with hers—how, in everything she had done, Falcon had been there to help her! It was not easy to bear the thought of all that.

But a happier spirit obtained sway in his heart, with the memory that all Jeanie had done, and all she had suffered, had been for his sake. His breast heaved, a big sob escaped him, and the strong man wept sad tears of repentance alone in the darkness of his prison. They brought him relief: they seemed to bring him light; and in the morning he was calm, grateful for the service which had been rendered him, and prepared to make honest acknowledgment of it.

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## CHAPTER LII.

BY THE GRAVE.

"Nae wrang can rouse, nae slight can move  
The dead frae sleep that quenches pain;  
Nae magic in the voice of love  
Can make the cauld heart beat again."—*Anon.*

ON the Monday forenoon Mr. Carnegie arrived at the jail, accompanied by Mr. Monduff. The necessary arrangements for liberating Robin had been made with a rapidity unexampled in the history of legal proceedings. The truth was, that the fiscal had exerted himself to dispose of the matter with the least possible delay; and now the worthy lawyer in a fussy way, and the minister in his quiet hearty fashion congratulated their friend on his release.

The doors were open for him to go, the dog-cart was waiting outside to convey him to Portlappoch, and, to the surprise of both gentlemen, he did not show any hurry to quit his prison.

He received their congratulations with a serious face, looking all the while over their shoulders, as if expecting to see somebody else. After he had thanked them in a quiet tone—

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not the tone of a man who had just been rescued from the gallows—he said—

“She hasna come wi’ ye?”

They understood then what was the matter, and the lawyer looked uncomfortable, blurting out with some hesitation and awkwardness—

“No, ye see she’s had a great deal to do, and she has over-worked herself: and, besides, ye cannot expect——”

He was checked by a motion of Mr. Monduff’s hand. The minister took Robin’s arm in a kindly grasp.

“You’ll no be long until you see her, have no fear of that, Cairnieford. The woman who could do what she has done for you, must have that in her heart which will make her glad to welcome you when she learns that you place any value on her welcome.”

“Value on her welcome! Oh, man, I care nougnt for a’ the world’s welcome if she be nae ane to say it’s weel I hae been spared—it’s weel nae shame is on me” (huskily and unsteadily, in spite of every effort to conceal the weakness).

“Aye, but she does not know that. Remember how you parted with her, and then set yourself with all your might to prove to her that, whatever you may have thought, felt, or said in passion, you see how false it all was, now that you are calm.”

“Thank ye, sir, for that; it gie’s me courage and hope too. I will prove to her that I ken her worth, and how cruelly I hae tried it.”

“Adam has gone back to his old home,” broke in the lawyer, “and Mrs. Gray went there this morning.”

After that Robin was eager to get back to the Port. They started in the dog-cart with a parting salute from the fiscal, who happened to appear in the court at the moment. On the way, Mr. Carnegie gave Robin a fuller account of all that had transpired than the fiscal had been able to do; and explained to him how Falcon turned out to be the son of Hugh Sutherland and the master of Clashgirn.

“I suspected that lang syne,” Cairnieford observed drily,

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"and I told ye o't at the time they were burying the lady, but ye wouldna hear o' sic a thing."

"What could I do on a mere suspicion without a grain o' proof o' ony sort to back it? Besides, I must confess that I was deceived by the man's pawky way—very much deceived."

Mr. Monduff interrupted the conversation by asking Cairnieford if he would attend the funeral of Wattie Todd.

"I think it is a duty you owe the poor lad and yourself," he said, "for nothing will better satisfy the folk of your sorrow for his misfortune."

"Poor Wattie! I will go, not because it matters to me, but because I liked him."

They were driving along the high road, and would enter the town at the head of the main street, where the kirk stood. The steeple was in sight when Mr. Monduff spoke, and as they approached they perceived that the gate of the churchyard was open. They dismounted at the manse.

Looking down the street, Robin saw a long procession slowly advancing up the brae. He stood by the gate with Mr. Carnegie. First came the coffin borne by four men, the two at the head wearing the garb of sailors, the other two the ordinary dress of the fishermen of the Port. Following behind the coffin came Girzie, a large 'kerchief thrown over her head concealing her features, and held tight under her chin by her hand. She walked with head bent, apparently unconscious of everything around her. Occasionally her eyes were raised from the ground, but only to rest a moment on the coffin, and then with a dull weary expression to droop slowly to the ground again. A long band of fishers and country folk followed in their everyday attire, having apparently just quitted their work to join the procession as it passed along; and, by this simple act of respect, expressing their sympathy with the mother. Hard weather-beaten faces most of them, dull and common-place features, but with a sober shade upon them now, that reflected the sincerity of the feeling which had prompted them to follow poor Wattie to his grave. The rough garments, the unkempt hair and unwashed faces, all sugges-

tive of busy struggling life, and the devout silence in which they listened to the minister's prayer, imparted by contrast a solemnity to the proceedings that no finery of mourning attire could have heightened.

Robin, with head uncovered like the rest, stood beside the new-made grave. His gaze was fixed upon the ground, and he did not notice the man who stood opposite him on the other side of the pit. The man was one of those who had been bearing the bier, and as soon as he had laid it down, took his place with head bowed, whilst the minister proceeded with his sad duty.

Girzie stood at the foot of the grave motionless. Her hands tightened their grip on the kerchief under her chin, and she frowned, as if the effort to restrain her emotion from the wild outburst for which it was struggling, gave her cause for anger with every one around her. When the first shovelful of earth rattled on the coffin, she started and glanced quickly down into the pit as if about to throw herself into it. Then, with a glance about her, but uttering no sound of grief, she sat down on a neighbouring tombstone, covering her face as if she shrank from the compassionating gaze of her friends.

The crowd slowly dispersed as the work of filling up the grave went on. The folk returned to their avocations to laugh, to joke, to sigh and struggle, and to remember this day with shaking of the head whenever they saw the silent woman pass amongst them.

Robin looked up, and recognized in the man opposite, him James Falcon. The latter drew back, as if he would avoid an encounter between them. Robin hesitated : he winced at the duty he saw before him, but he was no coward, and he would not shirk anything he felt he ought to do. He stretched out his hand to Falcon, beckoning him back. The latter halted, looked doubtfully at Cairnieford, and at the grave. Then he made a step nearer, as if drawn by some influence from the dead.

"James Falcon, or Mister Sutherland, as I understand ye should be called now, will ye speak wi' me a minute? It's

easier to be forgiving in the presence o' death than when we're in the pride o' health and strength. I doubt it's my fault, and maybe partly yours, that Wattie Todd's lying in the moulds enow; and ye canna refuse to hear me afore the sod is laid ower him."

"I'm listening" (somewhat shyly).

"I want to speir a question first. You ken what it is to care mair for ae body then for a' the world, and a' that's in't besides. Tell me then, if you had been in my place at Askaig, what would ye hae done?"

Falcon was silent, gazing darkly at the ground.

"If every thought ye had," Robin went on in a low agitated voice, "had been linked to her; if every hope had sprung frae her, if she had been light and joy and hame to ye, if she had been a' that heart could care for or head could think about, and ye had been cheated wi' suspicions o' her, poisoned wi' doubts o' her by a leeing tongue and by strange circumstances—tell me, sir, what ye would hae done in my place?"

With an impulsive jerk of his body, Falcon answered—"I would have been blind and mad as you were, I believe."

"It was an honest man that answered me. Will you take my hand now, for I feel nae shame in asking ye to pardon whatever wrang I hae done ye—"

"Whisht, Cairnieford," cried Falcon, interrupting him and wringing his hand warmly, "forget that if ye can; let it be buried there in poor Wattie's grave; and some day—years after this, long weary years they maun be to me, but happy ones to you, I hope—maybe you and your wife will be able to call me a friend."

"I call ye that now, and I am grateful to ye for letting me do it. I can feel something o' what ye hae sacrificed in helping me. But, sir, when I thought you were in trouble, I sought you to offer ye help, and to bid ye welcome to my house. Ye ken how I was cheated, and I only ask ye to judge me by what ye might hae thought and done yoursel' under the same circumstances."

"I do that. . . . I am glad you have called me a

friend, and I'll try to prove mysel' worthy o' the name by quitting the Port as soon as I can. She says it is better so, and she is right—God bless her."

He spoke these latter words very huskily. They shook hands again; and Robin went away to seek his wife, feeling more satisfied with himself and everybody else, now that he had made peace with Falcon, than he had done for many days.

Mr. Carnegie had informed him that Adam, unshaken by the passing events or the persuasions of the doctor, had on Saturday removed with Mrs. Lindsay to their own home. Jeanie had gone to Cairnieford on the Saturday night after the Laird's arrest, to place things in readiness for the anticipated return of the master.

With a full heart she had arranged the household just in the manner in which he most liked to see it. His chair was placed at the proper angle to the fire; his whips were hung up behind the door; his thick staff, which he used when going across the fields to look at the sheep or the cattle, was in the corner where he always sought it first, although he never placed it there himself; his bonnet and his plaid were laid on the little side-table near the window, as she had been accustomed to place them on the nights preceding market-days.

Then, after she had arranged everything ready to his hand, she had sat down on his chair and stared blankly round the place, saying to herself in a dull stupified sort of way, whilst something was throbbing and swelling in her breast—

"It's the last time I'll sort them for ye, Robin, the last time I'll sit here in the hame that was growing sae bright. Aye, but it's grown dark—dark noo, and I canna see the light o't ony'mair. . . . Lord, watch ower't and leave some glint o' pleasure in it for him. I never ken'd a' thae things sae weel as I do the day. I never thought I could hae found it sae hard to part wi' them."

And then the strength, which the excitement of all she had had to do gave her, broke down, and she cried in a sad quiet way. She could scarcely manage to walk to her father's

cottage on Monday morning. She succeeded by a great effort, and there Mr. Monduff and Mr. Carnegie had found her when they had wanted to persuade her to go with them for Robin, and there Robin sought her now.

The cottage had already resumed something of its old appearance. A net was hanging on the wall, oars were resting against the simple porch, and smoke was rising from the chimney. In the old days Robin had been accustomed to lift the latch and walk in; but now he knocked.

Adam himself answered the summons, and became unusually stiff and stern the moment he recognized the visitor.

"I'm glad to see ye on the right side o' the jail, sir," was his grim salutation.

"Thank ye, Adam, though ye look as if ye were rather angry than glad at the sight o' me. Weel, ye had reason to be angry wi' me; but I own I was in the wrang, and I hae suffered for't. Dinna bear ill-will against me longer than you can help."

"I bear nae ill-will" (stiff as ever).

"Is Jeanie here?"

"My dochter is here; and let me tell ye at once that ye canna see her enow, if that's what ye came here for. She's put a' things right for ye at your ain house, and now she's clean wrought out. She's ta'en her bed—"

"Is she no weel?"

"She's no weel ava, and the doctor says she's no to be fashed, and she said hersel' that if ye should come seeking her, I was to tell ye she couldna see ye, and she sha'na."

"May I no speak ae word to her, just to beg her no to think waur o' me than I deserve?"

"She doesna need ye to tell her that. Man, she thocht ower kindly o' ye even when ye were scorning her."

Robin turned his face from the stern old man, who was as hard and immovable as flint.

"Tell her," he said in a broken voice, "that I'll come here every day until she lets me speak to her—until she lets me hear frae her ain lips that she canna and winna forgive me."

He did not stay to say more, or hear Adam's answer.

He went to the doctor, and from him learned that Jeanie was in a state of low fever, brought on by excessive exertion of body and anxiety of mind. The excitement had sustained her whilst there was work to do; but the work completed, her husband safe, the collapse followed.

"What she has gone through," said the doctor finally, "would have killed many a woman in her condition, and I advise you to be careful to do nothing that may agitate her."

Robin went away. He knew now that unexplained other reason for her truth to him at which she had hinted. He was welcomed home by the farm folk with hearty rejoicing; but the home was bleak and cheerless without her. He could not rest, he could not live in it without her, and he rose with a passionate moan to quit the place.

Then he checked himself; became calmer, and with bowed head and sad face set himself to work and wait, hoping. Day after day he was at the cottage, always to receive the same dry answer from Adam—

"My dochter's doing brawly, but she's no fit to see onybody."

Robin, bearing in mind the doctor's warning, would not press his request yet awhile. He watched and waited.

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### CHAPTER LIII.

#### SETTLING DAY.

"The seas may row, the winds may blow,  
And swathe me round wi' danger;  
My native land I must forego,  
And roam a lonely stranger."—*From the Gaelic.*

CARRACH'S conduct did not alter in the jail, except so far as the shade of difference which might be distinguished between sullen silence and dull indifference. The fiscal tried every means in his power to obtain a statement from him of some sort. But the Highlander doggedly refused to say anything, even in his own defence.

At length the fiscal, hoping to rouse him, told him that there was important evidence against him.

"Was there?" said Carrach, rolling his eyes in the slow ox-like manner peculiar to him; "oich, but she was sorry for that, and wha was the evidence?"

"Donald, your mate, and the Laird."

"Did they'll told ye all about it?"

"Yes."

"Then what'll you want me to told you again for?"

"For your own sake and to get at the truth as nearly as possible."

At that Carrach gave a species of grunt which might have been intended for a laugh or an oath, but which certainly intimated that he did not take much interest in the pursuit of truth. He picked up a straw, from the heap which formed his couch, put it in his mouth and began deliberately to chew it. After a pause—

"Where was the Laird?" he inquired.

"Not far away."

"Where was that?"

"In the second cell from this; a prisoner like yourself" (surely that will make him speak out, the fiscal thought).

But the skipper coolly chewed the straw and rolled his eyes without displaying the least concern in tone or manner, whilst he said—

"In shail—ochone, but that was a fall doon. Well, you'll shust go to him. He'll told you what you'll want to know. I'll no spoke a word—pe-tam."

He adhered to that resolution, and with stolid placidity awaited the turn of events.

The Laird's conduct was that of abject terror. His limbs seemed to be paralysed, so that when he was laid on the straw heap which served as bed in the cell, he lay there for several days apparently incapable of rising.

He started wildly whenever any of the warders entered the cell, and shook as with the ague so long as he remained near him. He whined piteously at times, lamenting in a childish,

helpless manner the misfortune that had befallen him. At other times he would shriek out with hysterical vehemence that he was innocent, and that he would have everybody hanged or transported at least for the slander which had brought him to this pass.

On several occasions during the night he had started, apparently from sleep, uttering wild shrieks of terror which echoed along the stone corridors of the prison, until one of the turnkeys entered his cell with a light. Then his cries subsided into a piteous whine, and he implored the man to leave the light with him—the darkness was so horrible. It was clear that his reason had been affected by the discovery of his knavery and the dread of its consequences.

His frenzy reached a climax when he was visited by the sheriff-depute and the fiscal for the purpose of taking his deposition.

Mr. Smart entered first, and at sight of him the Laird started to a sitting posture, drawing his knees up to his chin almost, and clutching the straw under him with the spasmodic grip of a drowning man, whilst his body quivered and writhed as with intense physical pain. His pale ferrety eyes blinked, and his lips moved as if he were trying to speak; but he had no command over his tongue.

His terror was pitiable. The fiscal stepped over to him and held an open snuff-box towards him. The blinking eyes darted from the fiscal's face to the box, and back; a hideous girm twisted his features, and he uttered a shrill sort of laugh that grated like a harsh false note on the ear. His hand, shaking violently, dipped into the box, and as he filled his nostrils with the tobacco he obtained speech—

"Od, it's extraordinar'!"—(a high sharp tone and the girm still twisting his features)—"ye come an' offer me the prime consolation o' my miserable existence, and me thought ye was coming to take me awa' to the wuddie—no, I dinna mean that"—(checking himself with fierce shrillness)—"ye couldna do that—ye haena the power to do it. I'm wrangfully accused. I'm a martyred man, but I'll hae the law, sir.

I'll hae ye put through your facings to a tune ye dinna bargain for. I'll hae—wha's yon?"

His fit of passion disappeared as his eyes blinked at the sheriff, and all his shivering fear returned.

"Take another pinch, Laird," said the fiscal quietly, "it'll do ye guid."

"Wha's yon?" (taking a pinch, or rather a handful, half of which was scattered over his breast on the way to his nostrils).

"A friend, come to hear what information you can give us about this extraordinary business."

"I hae nae information to give, sir, I ken naething about it—"

The fiscal interrupted this new burst of vehemence.

"I should tell you, Laird, that the only chance I see for yoursel' is in making a clean breast of it and telling us everything."

The wretched prisoner's eyes blinked suspiciously from one to the other of his visitors as if he were eager to discover how far he might trust them, and how he might speak most to his own advantage. Weak and helpless as he was, he clung to life with the desperate tenacity of one whose doom meets him face to face.

"There is no other chance for you, Laird," added the fiscal quietly.

He snatched at the chance with feverish anxiety.

"Do you think that?—do you really think that?"

"I'm sure of it."

"And—and if I tell ye—that is, if I had onything to tell ye and would tell ye—will it gie me a chance to win out o' this?"

"Surely, surely."

The prospect sufficed; he was ready to confess anything that might help to save himself; he did not care who suffered so long as he might escape.

He bore testimony to the fidelity of what he had written as Carrach's confession. Except in regard to the opening state-

ment as to the circumstances under which it had been written, it was correct in every particular. The events it recorded had been impressed on his mind with a too painful distinctness by his own dread of being implicated in the crime for him to have made an error in any item. He supplied the necessary links to establish the identity of James Falcon as the son of the late Hugh Sutherland, and removed every obstacle to his taking possession of the estate.

When he had finished he seemed to be exhausted by his exertions, but he pleaded piteously for mercy.

"They winna hang me, fiscal," he cried, "it wasna me that did it. I'm an innocent man; they wouldna hang a poor creature like me."

"You are not like to die on the gallows," said the fiscal, to soothe him as he retired with the sheriff.

The Laird shrieked with ecstasy; then suddenly became silent and cunningly observant of all that passed around him, as if already calculating how he might turn it to future account.

He was quieter that afternoon than he had been since he had been imprisoned. He was quieter, too, during the night than he had been previously. The warders heard him groan two or three times; but they heard none of the wild frenzied shrieks with which he had formerly roused the echoes of the silent prison. The change was remarkable as well as a relief.

Early in the morning, when the warder entered his cell, he found the Laird quiet enough—he was dead. His body was twisted as if he had died in acute pain, and his eyes glared wider than they had ever done in life. He looked as if death had taken him by surprise. It was the miserable end of a miserable career.

Carrach was tried at the next circuit court. There were two charges against him; first, the murder of Wattie Todd; and second, the wilful burning of the brig called the *Colin*, to the danger of human life and the defrauding of the underwriters. In this latter case—the second in the indictment,

although the first in occurrence—he had not had any accomplice except the Laird. He had, however, purposely endeavoured to raise an ill-feeling between Falcon and the crew, so that the new hand might bear the brunt of any suspicion that might be entertained as to the cause of the fire.

This information was derived from the Laird's statement. The Highlander himself continued obstinately silent, even after he had learned that the Laird, before he died, had told everything.

With the stolid placidity which characterized him he listened to the proceedings at his trial. When the jury had given their verdict, "Guilty," and the judge asked him if he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be pronounced, he answered—

"What would I'll say when you'll no change your minds ?  
Shust gie us some ouskie, for it's tam dry wark hearkening to  
all this spoke about her own self."

Undisturbed he heard the doom spoken. Nothing could be got out of him except repeated demands for whisky.

"Oich ! but it was a bad day we'll saw Portlappoch again," he muttered on the morning fixed for his execution ; "but we'll see her no more—pe-tam."

As stolidly as if he had been ascending the companion-way of his own vessel he ascended the scaffold, and without a word of confession or complaint submitted to his fate.

Donald, surly and discontented with everything and everybody, was set free after he had given evidence at the trial. The crowd hooted him—why, it would be difficult to say, unless it might be that the crowd, which is always more or less sentimental and hates ingratitude even amongst rogues, fancied that Donald merited contempt for bearing witness against one who had been his friend. He never appeared in Portlappoch again.

For several days after Wattie's funeral Girzie had not been seen by any one save Falcon. When at last she crossed the threshold of her own door to mingle again amongst the toilers

for bread, she was a bent broken-down old woman, going about her work in a slow listless manner, never haggling now in buying or selling her fish. She displayed no concern for anything except the cuddly Dawnie. She treated the animal as if it had been human ; and permitted it to grow fat and lazy without ever attempting to quicken it with the whip, which in former days she had used freely.

When Falcon became formally acknowledged as James Sutherland, and proprietor of Clashgirn, he offered her the means of living without the necessity of work.

"No," she answered, shaking her head drearily ; "for the wee while I'm to be here, I maun dae something. When my hands are busy, they keep my head frae thinking. I maun daunner about wi' Dawnie alang the auld roads we used to travel when Wattie was wi' us ; and it's a comfort to me whiles to fancy he's beside us yet at some weel-ken'd spot. I hear him and see him syne, and ken that I'll be wi' him again afore lang."

She never referred to the Laird or Carrach. The only interest she displayed in their fate was by a slight start when she learned that the Laird was dead. A gleam of satisfaction flashed across her face as she said—

"I'm glad o' that."

Then she became silent and indifferent as before. She was obliged to appear as a witness at the trial of her brother ; but no information was obtained from her beyond a repetition of her evidence as to the manner in which she had identified the body of her son. Several years afterward, however, she told the master of Clashgirn, then Captain Sutherland, why she had warned him not to sail in the *Colin*. She had overheard part of a conversation between the Laird and Carrach ; and a careless observation the latter had made, when he had called on her before going on board, about the brig never coming to port again had roused her suspicions of meditated disaster. She had not made this known, because she had not wished to harm her brother or the Laird.



A clear cold morning, with a fresh breeze blowing in from the sea ; the bright blue waves tossing foamily ; the surge kissing the beach, and running away again with a loud song of invitation ; and the fishing-boats, with sails spread, dancing on the water.

Gruff Adam Lindsay stood at the door of his cottage, his hand grasped by that of James Sutherland, whose face was slightly averted from the old man's dry unsympathetic gaze.

Hutcheson sat on the dyke hard by, swinging his legs, and staring at the two men, apparently interested in their conversation, but not minding much whether he heard it or not, being already aware of its purport.

"No, ye needna waken her," Sutherland was saying huskily ; "I wasna meaning to see her at any rate. It's better for me maybe that I should not. But tell her that I was here ; tell her that I'm going away for many years maybe ; for I will never come back until I can take her hand with no other thought or feeling in my heart than what her friend and her guidman's should hae. Good-bye, Adam ; I hope ye'll be alive and weel when I come hame again."

"I'll do your bidding wi' respect o' your message to my dochter. Good-bye, sir, and a pleasant voyage," rejoined Adam, in much the same tone as if his friend had been about to make a trip to the Mull and back, instead of a journey round the world.

Sutherland shook the fisherman's hand warmly, and walked away at a rapid pace, as if afraid that he might be tempted to forego his resolution and seek an interview with Jeanie yet, which would only trouble her and himself too.

Hutcheson jumped off the dyke, and with a nod to Adam followed his some-time comrade.

"Ye're in an unco hurry to win awa'," he said, making up to him with a short race.

"Aye, I'm in a hurry," retorted Sutherland gloomily ; "what should I bide for ?"

"Naething particular that I ken o', except that it's a daft like thing to rin awa' frae ane's fortune the minute ye get hand o't."

"Carnegie will take care of the fortune, as you call it, and Mrs. Begg will take care of the house. They could not be in better hands."

"Every ane to his ain gate, as the sang says. If it had been me, I would hae thought they would hae been better in my ain hands."

"You'll have enough in yours with the schooner."

Hutcheson's face brightened.

"Aye, that's true; the schooner's my fortune. It's the chance I hae been striving for this wheen years; and I hope there may be a time yet when I'll be able to satisfy ye that gieing ye the siller back is the least part o' the payment."

"I'm satisfied of that now. So take me to Southampton, and then make your fortune if you can."

The schooner *Ailsa* sailed that afternoon from Portlappoch, fully manned, Hutcheson occupying the position of skipper and owner, and James Sutherland that of a passenger. Mr. Monduff and writer Carnegie went on board to bid good-bye to the new laird of Clashgirn before he set out on the journey, which promised to be a long one. Both had tried all their powers of persuasion to obtain from him a promise of speedy return; but they had failed.

"I have no wish," he said, with quiet firmness, "to neglect any of the duties which belong to my altered circumstances; but, honestly, I do not feel myself in a condition to discharge them. Above all, I feel that it is necessary to the peace of mind of others as well as of myself that I should be away from the Port for awhile. So, let us say no more on that head now. When I come back, you will perhaps acknowledge the advantages of the course I am adopting, however weak it may seem to you at present."

The minister grasped his hand.

"I believe you are right, Mr. Sutherland; it is the course of a brave man to turn his back on the disappointments of the past, and to face the emergencies of the present with a steady eye, and an earnest faith in the Lord's mercy. You will come back to us, I am sure, a contented, and therefore a happy man."

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"I hope so, sir; thank you," was Sutherland's response, grateful for this sympathy. "I know that I may ask you to do something for me?"

"Of course—anything."

"Well, will you deliver this an hour after we have sailed?"

Mr. Monduff looked at the superscription of the letter which was placed in his hand, and appeared to hesitate.

"I spent the last hour or so writing it in the cabin," Sutherland said steadily, although his under lip quivered slightly; "and I have had my doubts about sending it, as you have yours about delivering it. But, trust me, sir, there is nothing in it which you might not read—or her guidman either"—(the latter words spoken with an effort).

"I'll do your bidding," said the minister, satisfied, and putting the letter in his pocket.

At length the tide had reached its height. Mr. Monduff and Carnegie stepped ashore at the last minute. The anchor was raised, and with a hearty cheer the *Ailsa* put off on her voyage.

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#### CHAPTER LIV.

JAMES SUTHERLAND TO MRS. GRAY.

"The soldier frae the war returns,  
And the merchant frae the main;  
But I hae parted wi' my love,  
And ne'er to meet again."—*Cavalier Song*.

"I AM almost afraid to write; and yet the desire, or the temptation—or whatever the feeling may be called—is so strong upon me, that to relieve myself from a condition of nervous irritability I am compelled to sit down here and talk to you by the means of this paper. Whether you shall ever see it or not is a question to be decided afterwards.

"This is written in the cabin of the *Ailsa*—the place you were locked up in by Carrach. I am going to join my ship at Southampton; and we sail as soon as the tide rises. Hard work, time, and absence will help me to get over the —

"I stopped there; and for the last ten minutes I have been chewing the end of my pen because I did not know what word might be written in that place without offence to the wife of another man, and yet be true to my own feelings. Suppose we call it weakness, for it must be weakness that, in spite of my desire and resolution to the contrary, makes me think so much about you. One queer character of my thoughts puzzles me: they always fix upon you as you were on that afternoon before the *Colin* sailed, when we parted at the door of the cottage. I address you as Mrs. Gray; and if you were beside me now I would speak to you by that name; but I cannot *think* of you so.

"I have tried it—tried hard; but just when I seem to be catching a glimpse of you standing by his side as his wife, everything seems to fade from me except the memory of that hour when we parted with eyes looking hopefully to our meeting. Don't be angry with me for minding you of that. I did not mean to do it; but I seem to be writing in a kind of a daze, scarcely knowing what words my pen forms until they are down. I want to let you see my thought; I want to let you see my heart—not that you may be distressed by the sight of its sadness, but that you may be comforted, if you need comfort, by the knowledge of my determination to submit to the fate that has befallen us, and to conquer the weakness—aye, it is weakness, and bitter, bitter to thole—the weakness that unfits me for the duties of a man, and one whom Heaven has been kind to for all the grief that I have suffered. You see I speak of it already as of a thing gone by; and that is some gain.

"I wanted to see you before I left; and yet I wanted to spare you and myself the pain of another meeting. That is the thraward state my mind has been in ever since we were brought together again on board this boat—ever since you cried to me to come and help you. I am glad that I was able to do what I have done; but I am gladdest of all to remember that I have been able to take Robin Gray's hand in friendship over the grave of poor Wattie Todd, who [redacted] the

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direction of Him who leads us through darkness into light, became the instrument of restoring your peace and your guideman's.

"It was at Wattie's grave that I felt the first glow of real strength. What my duty was I had recognized a while before; but it had been in bitterness and with gairring heart, that made me conscious of how little power I had to fulfil the duty. There seemed to be only one chance of doing it, and that was by running away, by putting miles of land and water between you and me. But at Wattie's grave I became conscious that it was a coward's view I was taking of the case; that it was a mean snivelling sort of fear which made me believe I could never be honest if I allowed myself to be near you to see you and hear your voice.

"Then I discovered for the first time that my duty was to bow my head in submission to the will that had directed our lives otherwise than as we had planned them. I learned that the conduct of a true man was to regard your position with sacred respect; and to overcome the pitiful chagrin which rendered me incapable of looking calmly on your happiness and Cairnieford's, much less of taking pleasure in it.

"From that minute I turned with steady purpose to learn such respect for you, and to overcome that miserable envy—for it was nothing better—which made me look on Robin Gray unkindly. So much is not to be acquired in a day, or a week maybe; but with God's help I will acquire it, and if I ever come back to Portlappoch it will be with heart and mind purified of all useless regrets, and able to sympathize in the joys of your home.

"This was what I wanted to tell you when I went up to the cottage in the morning. I wanted to satisfy you that I was not going away the despairing wretched man you parted from at Askaig; but one who having made shipwreck of certain old hopes and dreams, had turned stoutly to seek new hopes and new aims in the busiest scenes of the world's strife.

"I wanted to tell you all about that; but when I got near to the house I felt something like the old weakness coming

over me ; and I feared that in spite of my resolution I would become a coward in your presence ; and that the cruel thoughts which troubled me when first I was made aware how fate had separated us would rise anew, leaving me unworthy of a good woman's memory.

"I was almost glad when your father told me that you were sleeping ; and yet I was sorry too. But I minded of Wattie Todd, and that helped the wiser part of me to get the upper hand. So I bade Adam not to waken you. I gave him a message for you, and came away thankful that I had made at least one step in the right direction in leaving without disturbing you.

"It is better so for both of us. I know that ; and yet I have been tortured and haunted all day by the notion that it would have been manlier for me to have said to you with my own lips what I have said here. The notion has followed me about, so that I have not been able to do anything, or to feel at ease, until I sat down to write this. I think there is nothing here that ought not be have been said ; nothing that you need be ashamed to read or I to send.

"I only want you to be happy—aye, and now I can say sincerely that I wish Robin Gray to live long to share that happiness with you. Having helped him for your sake seems to have done me good, and I am grateful to both of you for it. I am grateful to him besides for the help which I know now he wished to give me when he thought I needed it. That said, I already feel stronger and better in myself.

"In the madness which beset me when I first learned that the object on which I had bent my life was placed beyond my reach, I fancied there never could be any light in this world for me. Sitting here with the tide rising to carry me away to where strong hands are needed—with the water beating against the vessel and rocking me like a bairn in a cradle—I can review quietly all that is past, and feel that there is a future of honourable work for me that will bring pleasure with it, and of blessed content for you and yours.

"When I come back I will expect you to give me a welcome

home ; and I will expect your bairns and your man to join in the welcome.

“ Be kind to Girzie Todd, for she suffers more than any of us by what has happened. Good bye, and Heaven bless and prosper you and your husband,

“ Your faithful servant,

“ JAMES SUTHERLAND.”

Mr. Monduff was seated by the bedside whilst Jeanie slowly read the letter which he had delivered. He watched her with a paternal interest, waiting patiently until she had read it a second time, pausing at certain passages as if to fix their meaning on her memory.

Her eyes brightened and her face flushed. She was pleased by the generous nature of the writer which was revealed in every line : how nobly he tried to conceal his own pain that he might lighten hers ; how bravely he set himself to do whatever work might be assigned him, and to thrust aside all vain and selfish repining for the disappointment he had endured.

She was glad he had written ; she was glad he had enabled her to understand the healthy frame of mind with which he started on his voyage. She was proud to have been loved by such a man ; proud, without one thought which an angel could have blamed as an injustice to Robin Gray. The truth and courage which were revealed in this letter strengthened her in proportion to the relief she experienced on the writer's account. It made her a happier woman, and a better wife, in directing her eyes to the light in the future, than she ever could have been had she been haunted by the recollection of the grief which she had caused him. The letter seemed to have brought sunlight into the sick chamber.

“ You are gratified by what he says,” observed the minister, a little curious.

“ Read it, sir,” she answered, placing the letter in his hand.

Mr. Monduff obeyed, and his face also brightened as he read ; for his attachment to the writer made him sincerely anxious about his welfare.

"This is capital," he said warmly; "when a man has made up his mind to have a bad tooth out, the toothache is half-cured. That's just his case; and you will see him come home, marry some worthy woman, and settle down in a happy and respected home. Keep the letter, Mistress Gray, and show it to Cairnieford as soon as you can. It will do him as much good to read it as it has done me. The plans which James Falcon formed have miscarried, as he says; but they have opened a path to a noble life of usefulness and goodness."

"I believe that, sir, and I ken that he will follow it wi' steady steps and a brave heart."

"And you will do the same, I hope, Mistress Gray?"

"I'll try, sir."

"Then you will begin at once by sending for your guidman, and telling him that you have forgiven the misunderstanding of which he was as much the victim as yourself. Shall I bring him to-day?"

"Dinna ask me to do that yet, sir," she said imploringly. "I canna do it. It's no because there is ony anger in my heart against him; but I canna feel sure o' him being as free frae doubt o' me as he maun be before I can take my place in his house again."

"It is you who doubt him now" (gently reproachful).

"I canna explain mysel' very weel. I ken his kind nature, grieving ower what has happened, makes him anxious to mend the break atween us; but I'm feared, feared that after a while, or when ony bit quarrel got the better o' us, he might be sorry that we had cam' thegither again. But I dinna understand my ain feelings, sir, in the matter; whiles I'm like to greet thinking o' him, and syne I feel that it would be wrang o' me to gie into the first offer that his gratitude wins frae him. Ye'll call that pride and vanity maybe, and nae doubt ye would be right, sir; though I dinna feel it that way. Gie me time to think—dinna press me enow."

The minister felt that he ought to have reprimanded this stubbornness and inconsistency of the woman's nature; but she spoke with such simple earnestness that he could not find it in his heart to show even displeasure. So:

---

"Ah, well, we will give you time," he said quietly; "and more readily as I have great faith in that remedy. But remember, you are on the wrong side now."

"I'm sorry for that, sir, for I canna do what ye want. Even if he dinna think sae, I would feel that it was like taking advantage o' his position, and I couldna thole that. I gaed to him when he was in the hands o' the fiscal, and he wasna ower weel pleased to see me, as I hae mentioned to ye. I told him then that when the work was done, and he was safe, I wouldna fash him ony mair. I canna bring mysel' yet to take back the words. Yell no blame me ower muckle, sir? I would like to do onything that is right; but I canna feel that it would be right to profit by his gratitude. It would be like making a bargain out o' what has been done."

"You'll see it in another light soon, Mistress Gray," was the minister's answer.

Jeanie wished to see it in another light. She even owned to herself that her conduct was perverse and obstinate; that she was permitting pride to stand between her and the reconciliation which she knew ought to be made for her own sake and others. But whenever she thought of telling her father to bring Robin into the house, the memory of his coldness to her on that day of the fiscal's examination restrained her kindly impulse.

She heard very little of his doings, for Adam would not mention his name. Bessie Tait, however, was able to give her a little information, which she obtained from one of the servants at the farm. Bessie was acting as nurse, and quickly discovering that Jeanie liked to hear about Cairnieford, she gathered all the news about him that came within her hearing and carefully retailed it to her friend.

Jeanie listened and reflected. The new light was beginning to penetrate the sick chamber; and the letter the minister had delivered had some share in clearing the darkness. The whole trouble became little more than a question as to which should yield first: and it would soon have been settled if Robin had only known the real state of Jeanie's mind.

## CHAPTER LV.

## ROBIN'S GRACE.

"The oak that all winter was barren and bare,  
Again spreads his branches to wave in the air;  
All nature, rejoicing, appears clad in green."—*Anon.*

BUT Robin did not know, and he was profoundly unhappy in consequence. He took all the blame to himself, and he went about the farm with a fidgety irritable manner that razzled everybody who had dealings with him. He could not settle to do anything; and he kept moving about from place to place as if the spirit of unrest had taken possession of him, and doomed him to a state of continual motion.

Since the day of his release, he had not visited the town more than half a dozen times, although he was at Adam's cottage every morning. But on the second market-day after the sailing of the *Ailsa*, he dressed himself, and proceeded to the Port, as had been his custom on these occasions for many years. He had no cattle or grain to sell or buy; he had no business of the ordinary kind to transact, and he did not care much about the market itself now. He had lost interest in almost all those objects which formerly occupied him, and he was indifferent as to whether the price of grain were up or down. But for all that, he had a definite purpose in attending the market. He was driven to it chiefly by the spirit of unrest that was upon him, and partly by his desire to learn how recent events had affected him in the regard of his old friends. He had been in jail; the suspicion of crime had been attached to him; and he wanted to show his acquaintances and the folk generally that he could take his former place amongst them, and hold his head erect with conscious innocence.

He expected that many would shrink from him; that he would be received with cold looks and colder greetings; and that all would treat him as one who had lost his right to the position of an unblemished man. But he was mistaken; he was received with hearty congratulations by every one. There was not the faintest expression of blame on any of the ruddy countenances which pressed around him; there was

not the faintest hint of doubt as to his honesty pronounced by any of the tongues which welcomed him back to his old place: all hands were eager to grasp his, and all eyes brightened at sight of him.

He was confounded a little at first by so much good humour, but presently he began to experience a sense of relief, which would have rendered him perfectly happy had he not remembered that the one whose smile was worth more than all the kindness of the others had not welcomed him yet, and that Cairnieford was desolate in consequence. That thought stung him to the quick, and made him appear somewhat moody in the midst of the good-will with which he was received. He had gone there with dogged resolution to carry his head proudly in the teeth of the scorn and sneering looks which he had expected to encounter; but nobody scorned him, and nobody sneered at him; and so the motive for his resolution failing him, he was driven back upon the one source of discontent.

He was, however, obliged to drink many drams to his own prosperity; and what with the drams, the congratulations, and the jokes, he became somewhat gleeful towards evening, and was rather late in quitting the Port Inn. Stepping away from the door, he stumbled against young Dunbar.

"Hallo, Jock," he cried, slapping him on the shoulder, "ye're late in the town. Are ye gaun hame?"

"No' yet, Cairnie," answered Dunbar, a little awkwardly, and trying to laugh.

"No! Weel, I thought we might hae gaen thegither sae far. But what are ye biding for?"

"A friend I want to see particularly," was the response, whilst he became more awkward than before, and attempted to get away. "I hae been waiting three hours for her—for him I mean—"

"Oh, ho, I see what's in the wind!" cried Cairnieford, giving him another hearty slap on the shoulder, and laughing. "Never be ashamed o't. If she's a guid thrifty lass, marry her, and I'll dance the bauchles aff my feet at your weddin'."

"Thank ye, Cairnie," said Dunbar, joining in the laugh and recovering his self-possession now the truth was out; "ye'll maybe hae the chance sooner than ye think."

"I'm glad to hear't, lad. I gie ye joy; but wha's the lass? Do I ken her?"

"Ye do that, for it's just Bessie Tait, wha was bridesmaid at yer ain weddin'."

"Eh, is it her? She's a braw lass, and will make a sonsy wife, I doubtna. But mind, Jock, and ay keep the right side o' bad speaking. Thrapple the first man that says an ill word against her."

"See if I dinna" (with enthusiastic resolution).

"Where is she the noo?"

"She's just waiting on your guidwife, and hasna got hame yet."

"Waiting on Jeanie?—what a gowk I was no to think o' that afore. Jock, I maun see your lass—dinna be feared, man, I'll no spoil sport. But I maun speak twa or three words wi' her, and syne I'll leave her to yoursel'."

He saw her and spoke a good many more than three words to her. He had so many things to ask, and so many things to say, about Jeanie, that Dunbar became impatient, and slyly asked if he would come back in the morning, by which time perhaps Robin would have finished.

Cairnieford took the hint. He was a happier man than he had been for many days, for he had learned that Jeanie was not only as well as could be expected, but spoke of him often, always asking Bessie if she had heard how he was getting on. From which fact Bessie naïvely argued that Jeanie did not altogether hate her guidman.

A cunning plot was entered upon by these dark conspirators, and Bessie was to be the prime agent of its progress. When that was agreed upon, Dunbar was relieved by Robin's departure, his nose sniffing the keen night air with the greatest enjoyment, and his feet touching the ground with the lightness of youth.

He set to work now with a will. Mackie, the grieve, was

astonished next morning to find him going about with all his old interest in the affairs of the farm. His manner was still restless; but there was a strong undercurrent of hope which cleared away the nervous anxiety that had made him so fidgety and so unsettled in all he had attempted to do, or had directed to be done, since he had come home. He was now setting everything in order, and he became especially attentive to the arrangements inside the house.

"That's a guid sign," observed Mackie to the lass who told him about this; "we'll hae the mistress hame sune, or I'm mista'en."

As matters were progressing, it looked exceedingly probable that the grieve would not be mistaken.

Every day Robin saw Bessie Tait, and obtained from her fuller and more satisfactory reports as to Jeanie's condition than he could wring from the grim and unforgiving Adam.

He saw the old man every morning as usual, however, but he failed to make any impression on his stern nature that might tend to soften his memory of what occurred at Girzie Todd's place.

When the spring came with its green leaves and bright hearty days, a baby was born in fisher Lindsay's cottage. Then said Robin:—

"I will see my bairn—I will see my wife. I hae waited lang eneuch; I will wait nae langer."

So he went to the cottage, and Bessie Tait, who had been watching for his coming, ran to the door and admitted him before Adam could say a word.

Then she placed the bairn—a sturdy boy with big blue eyes—in his arms. He took the little thing as awkwardly as if it had been a figure of glass, and he had been afraid to break it.

"And it's a laddie tae—aye, aye!" he cried, looking at it with open-mouthed wonder.

At this juncture the little fellow began to cry with a vigour which was most satisfactory, as indicative of healthy lungs, and Bessie would have taken it from him. But:

"Na, na," said Robin, "I'll haud the bonnie wee dollie—puir wee man," and in a clumsy way he began to dandle it, and to cry "hush—sh—sh!"

Then kindly Bessie enticed grim Adam out of the room, and closed the door.

Jeanie did not speak although her eyes and heart were full of tears, and a quiet joy made the blood dance through her veins, so that she felt as if that moment atoned for all that she had suffered.

Robin felt awkward; burning to speak, and yet not knowing how to begin. So he rocked the little one in his arms, and cried "whist ye, whist ye, my bonnie lamb;" and uttered a series of extraordinary sounds which he supposed to be baby language, but the source and the meaning of which he could not have explained for the life of him. He tried to laugh whilst uttering the gibberish, and all the time the big brawny fellow's eyes were, like the mother's, glistening with tears of pleasure and hope.

At last he looked at the mother, whose pale face was turned towards him.

"Jeanie," he cried, with the baby singing a chorus, "will naething move ye to forgie me—winna our bairn do't?"

And he held the child in his outstretched arms, as if to let it plead for him. She took the bairn to her breast, hushing its cries, and then she answered with a low tender voice:

"I hae done that long syne, Robin; for I ken ye maun hae tholed muckle sorrow. But—"

"Dinna say but," he cried, bending over her; "God kens what I hae tholed; and God kens that it was because ye were sae dear to me that I was sae blind."

"You're e'en are open enoo?"

"Aye; but what guid is that to me, if they are only open to let me see what I hae lost, to let me see that there is nae hope for me o' winning it back in this world? Dinna send me awa', Jeanie; for the bairn's sake dinna send me awa'."

She looked straight in his eyes.

"Ye hae nae doubt left in your heart that I hae told you the truth?"

"Ye mind me o' my ain shame—ye mind me that I wish the tongue had been cut frae my mouth afore it had spoken the words it did ; ye mind me o' my ain misery when ye speir that."

"But it might rise between us again ; and that is what gar'd me think it would be better for us no to be thegither ony mair."

"Ye winna trust me"—(bitterly). "O woman, if there could be onything come between you and me again, the mindin' o' that night at Askaig would make me crush it aneath my foot like the pooshen head o' a serpent."

A pause, she gazing earnestly in his face. Then, satisfied :

"I believe ye, Robin."

"And ye'll come hame ? "

Another pause ; then, very softly :

"For the bairn's sake and your's as weel—yes."

"God be thanked."

He stooped down, and kissed her.

And so the bairn came, as the fable has it, with an angel's message ; and this particular message was one of grace to Robin Gray.

---

## CHAPTER LVI.

### A POSTSCRIPT.

"Time and tide had thus their sway,  
Yielding, like an April day,  
Smiling noon for sullen morrow,  
Years of joy for hours of sorrow."—*Scott.*

MR. CARNEGIE rubbed his hands with satisfaction ; the minister's wife shared her husband's content. They were seated in the parlour of the manse ; and the subject of conversation was the reconciliation of the Master and Mistress of Cairnieford.

"There is nobody more pleased wi' the upshot o' the babble than I am," observed the lawyer ; "and as things have come about it is as well that our young laird is left a bachelor ; for now he may seek a wife of education and position. If it was not for that I would be almost sorry that he had not got the lass he had so set his mind on. She would have been a lucky woman if she had only waited a wee."

"I think she is a lucky woman as it is," commented the minister; "we may regret that they have both had to suffer so much; but it is their sacrifice, as we may call it, which has proved their worth. She is a nobler woman, and he a nobler man, in having loved and parted as they have done, than they ever could have been, had any dispensation removed Robin Gray, and permitted them to become united. That might have contented them; but it could never have had half the value in the happiness of their lives that they will find in the consciousness of their fidelity to honour."

"Just so, sir, just so; but suppose it had been possible for Cairnieford to stand aside—"

"But you cannot suppose that, since he became her husband; and that sacred barrier once raised, it is impious to wish or to attempt to break it down. No, no, the life that lies before Mistress Gray and James' Sutherland, is, in view of all the circumstances, the truest and best."

"That may be—indeed I have no doubt that is as you say," continued the lawyer, who did not like to yield an argument even to the minister; "but Sutherland will never be the happy man he might have been had he been spared this disappointment."

"Hoot toot, Carnegie, you would fill the world wi' misanthropes. Man, our capabilities of enjoyment are mercifully unlimited. There never was a wound—mind, I make a distinction between wound and disease—there never was a wound, mental or physical, that time could not heal. We part from old friends and old associations, and we feel a sting at the off-going. But in a wee while we form new friendships and new associations, and are just as contented wi' them as we ever were wi' the old ones. You're no sentimental, are ye?"

"I hope no!" exclaimed Carnegie, horrified at the suggestion of such a weakness in a lawyer.

"Ah, weel, then, you'll have to admit the truth o' what I have said."

The minister's wife so evidently sided with the minister, that, to save his reputation as a responsible law-agent, Carnegie was obliged to yield.

---

Jeanie and the bairn were removed to Cairnieford as speedily after the re-union as circumstances permitted. In a little while she was bustling about the house, happy and contented. Robin's joy in his wife and child was as perfect as mortal's joy ever can be.

Dame Lindsay lived to enjoy many pleasant days in the bright home up the glen; and when her time came she passed peacefully away in her daughter's arms. Adam gave a silent acquiescence to the new arrangements; but no argument or prayer could prevail on him to quit the cottage—which he now occupied rent-free by the instructions of the young laird—to take up his abode at Cairnieford. He taught the bairns, as they grew up, to fish and row, to mend nets, to make boats and sail them; but he never overcame a certain degree of stiffness in all his dealings with Robin.

When, years after his departure in the *Ailsa*, Captain Sutherland came home, one of the first places he visited was Cairnieford. Half-a-dozen children ran out to greet him, the guidman grasped his hands in hearty welcome, and the guid-wife received him with a happy matronly smile. The minister's words were verified, and memory cast no shade on the meeting. There was no twinge of regret or envy in his heart when he saw the content which made the farmer's home bright. He could share their pleasures as a faithful friend; he could romp with the bairns; and he was as proud as a father might have been of the little fellow to whom his name had been given.

He was neither a crabbed nor a misanthropical man; but frank and jovial, with lively sympathies for all that was good and true. And he soon disclosed his admiration for the embodiment of these qualities; for one day it became known that Captain Sutherland was about to be married. The minister regarded the fact as another proof of the temporary nature of human despair. At any rate the Captain found a worthy mistress for his house; and the memory of his old passion, on the rare occasions when it occurred to him, was greeted with a quiet smile in which there was no sadness.

THE END.

LONDON, May, 1872.

A

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